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THE POETIC AND DRAMATIC WORKS OF ROBERT BROWNING

SIX VOLUMES IN THREE

VOLUME II



Robert Browning.

THE POETICAL WORKS OF ROBERT BROWNING

VOLUME II

THE RING AND THE BOOK: CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY: MEN AND WOMEN: DRAMATIS PERSONÆ: BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE, ETC.

WITH INTRODUCTIONS AND NOTES

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VOLUME III

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.

Browning first made mention of his most extended poem, so far as his published correspondence is concerned, in a letter to Miss Blagden from Biarritz, written September 19, 1862. In that letter he speaks of his "new poem that is about to be, and of which the whole is pretty well in my [his] head, — the Roman murder story you know."

It was in June of the year 1857 or 1858 that when wandering one day among the shops in the Piazza San Lorenzo, Florence, Browning found at a book-stall an old book describing in Latin a murder-trial that took place in Rome during the year 1679. It was a printed book, with manuscript additions; and it contained the testimony, pleadings of the lawyers, and various documents connected with the case as it appeared in court, with contemporary accounts of the execution. This book was bought by the poet for eightpence, carried to his home at Casa Guidi, and read through at once. By the evening the whole tragedy unfolded itself to his imagination in all its details. Deeply as he was interested, however, he did not at once decide to make the little book into a poem. In fact he offered it to Miss Ogle, author of *A Lost Love*, as a fitting subject for prose fiction; and Mrs. Orr is almost certain that he also offered it to one of his leading contemporaries as a subject for poetic treatment.

After four years had passed by, and his *Dramatis Personæ* and *In a Balcony* had been completed and published, the poet turned to the murder-trial himself with the purpose of giving it extended poetic treatment. When writing to Miss Blagden, in 1862, he had probably recently begun upon it, but had the subject then well in hand. Writing to the same person in August, 1865, he gave expression to his growing confidence in the greatness of the work he was engaged upon, for he said to her: "I

certainly will do my utmost to make the most of my poor self before I die. . . . So good luck to my great venture, the murder-poem, which I do hope will strike you and all good lovers of mine."

In writing this poem Browning made detailed use of the book he had bought in the Piazza San Lorenzo. The opening book of the poem gives a full account of his discovery, and of the contents of the volume he purchased so luckily. With literal truth he repeats the facts there presented. When asked if he did not feel happy to have created such a woman as Pompilia, he replied: "I assure you that I found her just as she speaks and acts in my poem in that old book." The poet also showed a warm affection for the old Pope of his poem. Once he found a medal of him in an antiquary's shop in London, and on his return to purchase it found that it was gone. He was told that Lady Houghton (Mrs. Richard Monckton Milnes) had bought it. He asked her to loan it to him, but she gave it to him instead, probably having bought it for that purpose. Some one also found in a London print-shop a portrait of Count Guido Franceschini on the day of his execution, and sent it to the poet.

Writing to Sir Frederic Leighton, October 17, 1864, Browning invited the aid of his friend in securing accuracy of description in his account of Pompilia: "A favor, if you have time for it. Go into the church St. Lorenzo in Lucina in the Corso — and look attentively at it — so as to describe it to me on your return. The general arrangement of the building, if with a nave — pillars or not — the number of altars, and any particularity there may be — over the High Altar is a famous Crucifixion by Guido. It will be of great use to me. I don't care about the *outside*."

Shortly before its publication Browning wrote: "I want to get done with my poem. Booksellers are making me pretty offers for it. One sent to propose, last week, to publish it at his risk, giving me all the profits, and pay me the whole in advance — for the incidental advantages of my name — the R. B. who for six months once did not sell one copy of the poems! I ask £200 for the sheets to America, and shall get it."

The first three books of the poem were published in London

during November, 1868, and were followed in December by the second volume of the same number of books. The remaining two volumes appeared in January and February, 1869, each containing three books. The poem was at once favorably received, appreciative reviews were devoted to it, and it was read with interest and admiration. For the first time in his career of authorship Browning found himself accepted as a great poet. The recognition had come tardily, but it was now assured and permanent.

THE RING AND THE BOOK

[1868–9]

I.

THE RING AND THE BOOK.

Do you see this Ring?
'T is Rome-work, made to match
(By Castellani's imitative craft)
Etrurian circlets found, some happy morn,
After a dropping April; found alive
Spark-like 'mid unearthed slope-side figtree-roots
That roof old tombs at Chiusi: soft, you see,
Yet crisp as jewel-cutting. There 's one trick,
(Craftsmen instruct me) one approved device
And but one, fits such slivers of pure gold
As this was, — such mere oozings from the mine,
Virgin as oval tawny pendent tear
At beehive-edge when ripened combs o'erflow, —
To bear the file's tooth and the hammer's tap:
Since hammer needs must widen out the round,
And file emboss it fine with lily-flowers,
Ere the stuff grow a ring-thing right to wear.
That trick is: the artificer melts up wax
With honey, so to speak; he mingles gold
With gold's alloy, and, duly tempering both,
Effects a manageable mass, then works:
But his work ended, once the thing a ring,
Oh, there 's repristination! Just a spirt
O' the proper fiery acid o'er its face,
And forth the alloy unfastened flies in fume;
While, self-sufficient now, the shape remains,
The rondure brave, the lilied loveliness,
Gold as it was, is, shall be evermore:
Prime nature with an added artistry —
No carat lost, and you have gained a ring.
What of it? 'T is a figure, a symbol, say;
A thing's sign: now for the thing signified.

Do you see this square old yellow Book, I toss
I' the air, and catch again, and twirl about
By the crumpled vellum covers, — pure crude fact
Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,
And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since?
Examine it yourselves! I found this book,
Gave a *lira* for it, eightpence English just,
(Mark the predestination!) when a Hand,
Always above my shoulder, pushed me once,
One day still fierce 'mid many a day struck calm,
Across a Square in Florence, crammed with booths,
Buzzing and blaze, noontide and market-time,
Toward Baccio's marble, — ay, the basement-ledge
O' the pedestal where sits and menaces
John of the Black Bands with the upright spear,
'Twixt palace and church, — Riccardi where they lived,
His race, and San Lorenzo where they lie.
This book, — precisely on that palace-step
Which, meant for lounging knaves o' the Medici,
Now serves re-venders to display their ware, —
'Mongst odds and ends of ravage, picture-frames
White through the worn gilt, mirror-sconces chipped,
Bronze angel-heads once knobs attached to chests
(Handled when ancient dames chose forth brocade),
Modern chalk drawings, studies from the nude,
Samples of stone, jet, breccia, porphyry
Polished and rough, sundry amazing busts
In baked earth (broken, Providence be praised!)
A wreck of tapestry, proudly-purposed web
When reds and blues were indeed red and blue,
Now offered as a mat to save bare feet
(Since carpets constitute a cruel cost)
Treading the chill scagliola bedward; then
A pile of brown-etched prints, two *crazie* each,
Stopped by a conch a-top from fluttering forth
— Sowing the Square with works of one and the same
Master, the imaginative Sienese
Great in the scenic backgrounds — (name and fame
None of you know, nor does he fare the worse:)
From these . . . Oh, with a Lionard going cheap
If it should prove, as promised, that Joconde
Whereof a copy contents the Louvre! — these
I picked this book from. Five compeers in flank
Stood left and right of it as tempting more —
A dogseared Spicilegium, the fond tale
O' the Frail One of the Flower, by young Dumas,

Vulgarized Horace for the use of schools,
The Life, Death, Miracles of Saint Somebody,
Saint Somebody Else, his Miracles, Death and Life, —
With this, one glance at the lettered back of which,
And "Stall!" cried I: a *lira* made it mine.

Here it is, this I toss and take again;
Small-quarto size, part print part manuscript:
A book in shape but, really, pure crude fact
Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,
And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since.
Give it me back! The thing 's restorative
I' the touch and sight.

That memorable day,
(June was the month, Lorenzo named the Square),
I leaned a little and overlooked my prize
By the low railing round the fountain-source
Close to the statue, where a step descends:
While clinked the cans of copper, as stooped and rose
Thick-ankled girls who brimmed them, and made place
For marketmen glad to pitch basket down,
Dip a broad melon-leaf that holds the wet,
And whisk their faded fresh. And on I read
Presently, though my path grew perilous
Between the outspread straw-work, piles of plait
Soon to be flapping, each o'er two black eyes
And swathe of Tuscan hair, on festas fine:
Through fire-irons, tribes of tongs, shovels in sheaves,
Skeleton bedsteads, wardrobe-drawers agape,
Rows of tall slim brass lamps with dangling gear, —
And worse, cast clothes a-sweetening in the sun:
None of them took my eye from off my prize.
Still read I on, from written title-page
To written index, on, through street and street,
At the Strozzi, at the Pillar, at the Bridge;
Till, by the time I stood at home again
In Casa Guidi by Felice Church,
Under the doorway where the black begins
With the first stone-slab of the staircase cold,
I had mastered the contents, knew the whole truth
Gathered together, bound up in this book,
Print three-fifths, written supplement the rest.
"*Romana Homicidiorum*" — nay,
Better translate — "A Roman murder-case:
Position of the entire criminal cause

Of Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
With certain Four the cutthroats in his pay,
Tried, all five, and found guilty and put to death
By heading or hanging as befitted ranks,
At Rome on February Twenty Two,
Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight:
Wherein it is disputed if, and when,
Husbands may kill adulterous wives, yet 'scape
The customary forfeit."

Word for word,
So ran the title-page: murder, or else
Legitimate punishment of the other crime,
Accounted murder by mistake, — just that
And no more, in a Latin cramp enough
When the law had her eloquence to launch,
But interfilleted with Italian streaks
When testimony stooped to mother-tongue, —
That, was this old square yellow book about.

Now, as the ingot, ere the ring was forged,
Lay gold, (beseech you, hold that figure fast!)
So, in this book lay absolutely truth,
Fanciless fact, the documents indeed,
Primary lawyer-pleadings for, against,
The aforesaid Five; real summed-up circumstance
Adduced in proof of these on either side,
Put forth and printed, as the practice was,
At Rome, in the Apostolic Chamber's type,
And so submitted to the eye o' the Court
Presided over by His Reverence
Rome's Governor and Criminal Judge, — the trial
Itself, to all intents, being then as now
Here in the book and nowise out of it;
Seeing, there properly was no judgment-bar,
No bringing of accuser and accused,
And whoso judged both parties, face to face
Before some court, as we conceive of courts.
There was a Hall of Justice; that came last:
For Justice had a chamber by the hall
Where she took evidence first, summed up the same,
Then sent accuser and accused alike,
In person of the advocate of each,
To weigh its worth, thereby arrange, array
The battle. 'T was the so-styled Fisc began,
Pleaded (and since he only spoke in print

The printed voice of him lives now as then)
The public Prosecutor — "Murder 's proved;
With five . . . what we call qualities of bad,
Worse, worst, and yet worse still, and still worse yet;
Crest over crest crowning the cockatrice,
That beggar hell's regalia to enrich
Count Guido Franceschini: punish him!"
Thus was the paper put before the court
In the next stage, (no noisy work at all,)
To study at ease. In due time like reply
Came from the so-styled Patron of the Poor,
Official mouthpiece of the five accused
Too poor to fee a better, — Guido's luck
Or else his fellows', — which, I hardly know, —
An outbreak as of wonder at the world,
A fury-fit of outraged innocence,
A passion of betrayed simplicity:
"Punish Count Guido? For what crime, what hint
O' the color of a crime, inform us first!
Reward him rather! Recognize, we say,
In the deed done, a righteous judgment dealt!
All conscience and all courage, — there's our Count
Charactered in a word; and, what 's more strange,
He had companionship in privilege,
Found four courageous conscientious friends:
Absolve, applaud all five, as props of law,
Sustainers of society! — perchance
A trifle over-hasty with the hand
To hold her tottering ark, had tumbled else;
But that 's a splendid fault whereat we wink,
Wishing your cold correctness sparkled so!"
Thus paper second followed paper first,
Thus did the two join issue — nay, the four,
Each pleader having an adjunct. "True, he killed
— So to speak — in a certain sort — his wife,
But laudably, since thus it happed!" quoth one:
Whereat, more witness and the case postponed.
"Thus it happed not, since thus he did the deed,
And proved himself thereby portentousest
Of cutthroats and a prodigy of crime,
As the woman that he slaughtered was a saint,
Martyr and miracle!" quoth the other to match:
Again, more witness, and the case postponed.
"A miracle, ay — of lust and impudence;
Hear my new reasons!" interposed the first:
"— Coupled with more of mine!" pursued his peer.

"Beside, the precedents, the authorities!"
From both at once a cry with an echo, that!
That was a firebrand at each fox's tail . . .
Unleashed in a cornfield: soon spread flare enough,
As hurtled thither and there heaped themselves
From earth's four corners, all authority
And precedent for putting wives to death,
Or letting wives live, sinful as they seem.
How legislated, now, in this respect,
Solon and his Athenians? Quote the code
Of Romulus and Rome! Justinian speak!
Nor modern Baldo, Bartolo be dumb!
The Roman voice was potent, plentiful;
Cornelia de Sicariis hurried to help
Pompeia de Parricidiis; Julia de
Something-or-other jostled *Lex* this-and-that;
King Solomon confirmed Apostle Paul:
That nice decision of Dolabella, eh?
That pregnant instance of Theodoric, oh!
Down to that choice example Ælian gives
(An instance I find much insisted on)
Of the elephant who, brute-beast though he were,
Yet understood and punished on the spot
His master's naughty spouse and faithless friend;
A true tale which has edified each child,
Much more shall flourish favored by our court!
Pages of proof this way, and that way proof,
And always — once again the case postponed.

Thus wrangled, brangled, jangled they a month,
— Only on paper, pleadings all in print,
Nor ever was, except i' the brains of men,
More noise by word of mouth than you hear now —
Till the court cut all short with "Judged, your cause.
Receive our sentence! Praise God! We pronounce
Count Guido devilish and damnable:
His wife Pompilia in thought, word and deed,
Was perfect pure, he murdered her for that:
As for the Four who helped the One, all Five —
Why, let employer and hirelings share alike
In guilt and guilt's reward, the death their due!"

So was the trial at end, do you suppose?
"Guilty you find him, death you doom him to?
Ay, were not Guido, more than needs, a priest,
Priest and to spare!" — this was a shot reserved;

I learn this from epistles which begin
Here where the print ends, — see the pen and ink
Of the advocate, the ready at a pinch! —
"My client boasts the clerkly privilege,
Has taken minor orders many enough,
Shows still sufficient chrism upon his pate
To neutralize a blood-stain: *presbyter,*
Primæ tonsuræ, subdiaconus,
Sacerdos, so he slips from underneath
Your power, the temporal, slides inside the robe
Of mother Church: to her we make appeal
By the Pope, the Church's head!"

A parlous plea,
Put in with noticeable effect, it seems;
"Since straight," — resumes the zealous orator,
Making a friend acquainted with the facts, —
"Once the word 'clericality' let fall,
Procedure stopped and freer breath was drawn
By all considerate and responsible Rome."
Quality took the decent part, of course;
Held by the husband, who was noble too:
Or, for the matter of that, a churl would side
With too-refined susceptibility,
And honor which, tender in the extreme,
Stung to the quick, must roughly right itself
At all risks, not sit still and whine for law
As a Jew would, if you squeezed him to the wall,
Brisk-trotting through the Ghetto. Nay, it seems,
Even the Emperor's Envoy had his say
To say on the subject; might not see, unmoved,
Civility menaced throughout Christendom
By too harsh measure dealt her champion here.
Lastly, what made all safe, the Pope was kind,
From his youth up, reluctant to take life,
If mercy might be just and yet show grace;
Much more unlikely then, in extreme age,
To take a life the general sense bade spare.
'T was plain that Guido would go scatheless yet.

But human promise, oh, how short of shine!
How topple down the piles of hope we rear!
How history proves . . . nay, read Herodotus!
Suddenly starting from a nap, as it were,
A dog-sleep with one shut, one open orb,
Cried the Pope's great self, — Innocent by name

And nature too, and eighty-six years old,
Antonio Pignatelli of Naples, Pope
Who had trod many lands, known many deeds,
Probed many hearts, beginning with his own,
And now was far in readiness for God, —
'T was he who first bade leave those souls in peace,
Those Jansenists, re-nicknamed Molinists,
('Gainst whom the cry went, like a frowsy tune,
Tickling men's ears — the sect for a quarter of an hour
I' the teeth of the world which, clown-like, loves to chew
Be it but a straw 'twixt work and whistling-while,
Taste some vituperation, bite away,
Whether at marjoram-sprig or garlic-clove,
Aught it may sport with, spoil, and then spit forth,)
"Leave them alone," bade he, "those Molinists!
Who may have other light than we perceive,
Or why is it the whole world hates them thus?"
Also he peeled off that last scandal-rag
Of Nepotism; and so observed the poor
That men would merrily say, "Halt, deaf and blind,
Who feed on fat things, leave the master's self
To gather up the fragments of his feast,
These be the nephews of Pope Innocent! —
His own meal costs but five carlines a day,
Poor-priest's allowance, for he claims no more."
— He cried of a sudden, this great good old Pope,
When they appealed in last resort to him,
"I have mastered the whole matter: I nothing doubt
Though Guido stood forth priest from head to heel,
Instead of, as alleged, a piece of one, —
And further, were he, from the tonsured scalp
To the sandaled sole of him, my son and Christ's,
Instead of touching us by finger-tip
As you assert, and pressing up so close
Only to set a blood-smutch on our robe, —
I and Christ would renounce all right in him.
Am I not Pope, and presently to die,
And busied how to render my account,
And shall I wait a day ere I decide
On doing or not doing justice here?
Cut off his head to-morrow by this time,
Hang up his four mates, two on either hand,
And end one business more!"

So said, so done —
Rather so writ, for the old Pope bade this,

I find, with his particular chirograph,
His own no such infirm hand, Friday night;
And next day, February Twenty Two,
Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight,
— Not at the proper head-and-hanging-place
On bridge-foot close by Castle Angelo,
Where custom somewhat staled the spectacle,
('T was not so well i' the way of Rome, beside,
The noble Rome, the Rome of Guido's rank)
But at the city's newer gayer end, —
The cavalcading promenading place
Beside the gate and opposite the church
Under the Pincian gardens green with Spring,
'Neath the obelisk 'twixt the fountains in the Square,
Did Guido and his fellows find their fate,
All Rome for witness, and — my writer adds —
Remonstrant in its universal grief,
Since Guido had the suffrage of all Rome.

This is the bookful; thus far take the truth,
The untempered gold, the fact untampered with,
The mere ring-metal ere the ring be made!
And what has hitherto come of it? Who preserves
The memory of this Guido, and his wife
Pompilia, more than Adeniollo's name,
The etcher of those prints, two *crazie* each,
Saved by a stone from snowing broad the Square
With scenic backgrounds? Was this truth of force?
Able to take its own part as truth should,
Sufficient, self-sustaining? Why, if so —
Yonder 's a fire, into it goes my book,
As who shall say me nay, and what the loss?
You know the tale already: I may ask,
Rather than think to tell you, more thereof, —
Ask you not merely who were he and she,
Husband and wife, what manner of mankind,
But how you hold concerning this and that
Other yet-unnamed actor in the piece.
The young frank handsome courtly Canon, now,
The priest, declared the lover of the wife,
He who, no question, did elope with her,
For certain bring the tragedy about,
Giuseppe Caponsacchi; — his strange course
I' the matter, was it right or wrong or both?
Then the old couple, slaughtered with the wife
By the husband as accomplices in crime,

Those Comparini, Pietro and his spouse, —
What say you to the right or wrong of that,
When, at a known name whispered through the door
Of a lone villa on a Christmas night,
It opened that the joyous hearts inside
Might welcome as it were an angel-guest
Come in Christ's name to knock and enter, sup
And satisfy the loving ones he saved;
And so did welcome devils and their death?
I have been silent on that circumstance
Although the couple passed for close of kin
To wife and husband, were by some accounts
Pompilia's very parents: you know best.
Also that infant the great joy was for,
That Gaetano, the wife's two-weeks' babe,
The husband's first-born child, his son and heir,
Whose birth and being turned his night to day —
Why must the father kill the mother thus
Because she bore his son and saved himself?

Well, British Public, ye who like me not,
(God love you!) and will have your proper laugh
At the dark question, laugh it! I laugh first.
Truth must prevail, the proverb vows; and truth
— Here is it all i' the book at last, as first
There it was all i' the heads and hearts of Rome
Gentle and simple, never to fall nor fade
Nor be forgotten. Yet, a little while,
The passage of a century or so,
Decads thrice five, and here 's time paid his tax,
Oblivion gone home with her harvesting,
And all left smooth again as scythe could shave.
Far from beginning with you London folk,
I took my book to Rome first, tried truth's power
On likely people. "Have you met such names?
Is a tradition extant of such facts?
Your law-courts stand, your records frown a-row:
What if I rove and rummage?" "— Why, you 'll waste
Your pains and end as wise as you began!"
Every one snickered: "names and facts thus old
Are newer much than Europe news we find
Down in to-day's *Diario*. Records, quotha?
Why, the French burned them, what else do the French?
The rap-and-rending nation! And it tells
Against the Church, no doubt, — another gird
At the Temporality, your Trial, of course?"

"— Quite otherwise this time," submitted I;
"Clean for the Church and dead against the world,
The flesh and the devil, does it tell for once."
"— The rarer and the happier! All the same,
Content you with your treasure of a book,
And waive what 's wanting! Take a friend's advice!
It 's not the custom of the country. Mend
Your ways indeed and we may stretch a point:
Go get you manned by Manning and new-manned
By Newman and, mayhap, wise-manned to boot
By Wiseman, and we 'll see or else we won't!
Thanks meantime for the story, long and strong,
A pretty piece of narrative enough,
Which scarce ought so to drop out, one would think,
From the more curious annals of our kind.
Do you tell the story, now, in off-hand style,
Straight from the book? Or simply here and there,
(The while you vault it through the loose and large)
Hang to a hint? Or is there book at all,
And don't you deal in poetry, make-believe,
And the white lies it sounds like?"

Yes and no!

From the book, yes; thence bit by bit I dug
The lingot truth, that memorable day,
Assayed and knew my piecemeal gain was gold,—
Yes; but from something else surpassing that,
Something of mine which, mixed up with the mass,
Made it bear hammer and be firm to file.
Fancy with fact is just one fact the more;
To wit, that fancy has informed, transpierced,
Thridded and so thrown fast the facts else free,
As right through ring and ring runs the djereed
And binds the loose, one bar without a break.
I fused my live soul and that inert stuff,
Before attempting smithcraft, on the night
After the day when — truth thus grasped and gained —
The book was shut and done with and laid by
On the cream-colored massive agate, broad
'Neath the twin cherubs in the tarnished frame
O' the mirror, tall thence to the ceiling-top.
And from the reading, and that slab I leant
My elbow on, the while I read and read,
I turned, to free myself and find the world,
And stepped out on the narrow terrace, built
Over the street and opposite the church,
And paced its lozenge-brickwork sprinkled cool;

Because Felice-church-side stretched, aglow
Through each square window fringed for festival,
Whence came the clear voice of the cloistered ones
Chanting a chant made for midsummer nights —
I know not what particular praise of God,
It always came and went with June. Beneath
I' the street, quick shown by openings of the sky
When flame fell silently from cloud to cloud,
Richer than that gold snow Jove rained on Rhodes,
The townsmen walked by twos and threes, and talked,
Drinking the blackness in default of air —
A busy human sense beneath my feet:
While in and out the terrace-plants, and round
One branch of tall datura, waxed and waned
The lamp-fly lured there, wanting the white flower.
Over the roof o' the lighted church I looked
A bowshot to the street's end, north away
Out of the Roman gate to the Roman road
By the river, till I felt the Apennine.
And there would lie Arezzo, the man's town,
The woman's trap and cage and torture-place,
Also the stage where the priest played his part,
A spectacle for angels, — ay, indeed,
There lay Arezzo! Farther then I fared,
Feeling my way on through the hot and dense,
Romeward, until I found the wayside inn
By Castelnuovo's few mean hut-like homes
Huddled together on the hill-foot bleak,
Bare, broken only by that tree or two
Against the sudden bloody splendor poured
Cursewise in day's departure by the sun
O'er the low house-roof of that squalid inn
Where they three, for the first time and the last,
Husband and wife and priest, met face to face.
Whence I went on again, the end was near,
Step by step, missing none and marking all,
Till Rome itself, the ghastly goal, I reached.
Why, all the while, — how could it otherwise? —
The life in me abolished the death of things,
Deep calling unto deep: as then and there
Acted itself over again once more
The tragic piece. I saw with my own eyes
In Florence as I trod the terrace, breathed
The beauty and the fearfulness of night,
How it had run, this round from Rome to Rome —
Because, you are to know, they lived at Rome,

Pompilia's parents, as they thought themselves,
Two poor ignoble hearts who did their best
Part God's way, part the other way than God's,
To somehow make a shift and scramble through
The world's mud, careless if it splashed and spoiled,
Provided they might so hold high, keep clean
Their child's soul, one soul white enough for three,
And lift it to whatever star should stoop,
What possible sphere of purer life than theirs
Should come in aid of whiteness hard to save.
I saw the star stoop, that they strained to touch,
And did touch and depose their treasure on,
As Guido Franceschini took away
Pompilia to be his forevermore,
While they sang "Now let us depart in peace,
Having beheld thy glory, Guido's wife!"
I saw the star supposed, but fog o' the fen,
Gilded star-fashion by a glint from hell;
Having been heaved up, haled on its gross way,
By hands unguessed before, invisible help
From a dark brotherhood, and specially
Two obscure goblin creatures, fox-faced this,
Cat-clawed the other, called his next of kin
By Guido the main monster, — cloaked and caped,
Making as they were priests, to mock God more, —
Abate Paul, Canon Girolamo.
These who had rolled the starlike pest to Rome
And stationed it to suck up and absorb
The sweetness of Pompilia, rolled again
That bloated bubble, with her soul inside,
Back to Arezzo and a palace there —
Or say, a fissure in the honest earth
Whence long ago had curled the vapor first,
Blown big by nether fires to appall day:
It touched home, broke, and blasted far and wide.
I saw the cheated couple find the cheat
And guess what foul rite they were captured for, —
Too fain to follow over hill and dale
That child of theirs caught up thus in the cloud
And carried by the Prince o' the Power of the Air
Whither he would, to wilderness or sea.
I saw them, in the potency of fear,
Break somehow through the satyr-family
(For a gray mother with a monkey-mien
Mopping and mowing, was apparent too,
As, confident of capture, all took hands

And danced about the captives in a ring)
— Saw them break through, breathe safe, at Rome again,
Saved by the selfish instinct, losing so
Their loved one left with haters. These I saw,
In recrudescency of baffled hate,
Prepare to wring the uttermost revenge
From body and soul thus left them: all was sure,
Fire laid and caldron set, the obscene ring traced,
The victim stripped and prostrate: what of God?
The cleaving of a cloud, a cry, a crash,
Quenched lay their caldron, cowered i' the dust the crew,
As, in a glory of armor like Saint George,
Out again sprang the young good beauteous priest
Bearing away the lady in his arms,
Saved for a splendid minute and no more.
For, whom i' the path did that priest come upon,
He and the poor lost lady borne so brave,
— Checking the song of praise in me, had else
Swelled to the full for God's will done on earth —
Whom but a dusk misfeatured messenger,
No other than the angel of this life,
Whose care is lest men see too much at once.
He made the sign, such God-glimpse must suffice,
Nor prejudice the Prince o' the Power of the Air,
Whose ministration piles us overhead
What we call, first, earth's roof and, last, heaven's floor,
Now grate o' the trap, then outlet of the cage:
So took the lady, left the priest alone,
And once more canopied the world with black.
But through the blackness I saw Rome again,
And where a solitary villa stood
In a lone garden-quarter: it was eve,
The second of the year, and oh so cold!
Ever and anon there flittered through the air
A snow-flake, and a scanty couch of snow
Crusted the grass-walk and the garden-mould.
All was grave, silent, sinister, — when, ha?
Glimmeringly did a pack of were-wolves pad
The snow, those flames were Guido's eyes in front,
And all five found and footed it, the track,
To where a threshold-streak of warmth and light
Betrayed the villa-door with life inside,
While an inch outside were those blood-bright eyes,
And black lips wrinkling o'er the flash of teeth,
And tongues that lolled — O God that madest man!
They parleyed in their language. Then one whined —

That was the policy and master-stroke —
Deep in his throat whispered what seemed a name —
"Open to Caponsacchi!" Guido cried:
"Gabriel!" cried Lucifer at Eden-gate.
Wide as a heart, opened the door at once,
Showing the joyous couple, and their child
The two-weeks' mother, to the wolves, the wolves
To them. Close eyes! And when the corpses lay
Stark-stretched, and those the wolves, their wolf-work done,
Were safe-embosomed by the night again,
I knew a necessary change in things;
As when the worst watch of the night gives way,
And there comes duly, to take cognizance,
The scrutinizing eye-point of some star —
And who despairs of a new daybreak now?
Lo, the first ray protruded on those five!
It reached them, and each felon writhed transfixed.
Awhile they palpitated on the spear
Motionless over Tophet: stand or fall?
"I say, the spear should fall — should stand, I say!"
Cried the world come to judgment, granting grace
Or dealing doom according to world's wont,
Those world's-bystanders grouped on Rome's cross-road
At prick and summons of the primal curse
Which bids man love as well as make a lie.
There prattled they, discoursed the right and wrong,
Turned wrong to right, proved wolves sheep and sheep wolves,
So that you scarce distinguished fell from fleece;
Till out spoke a great guardian of the fold,
Stood up, put forth his hand that held the crook,
And motioned that the arrested point decline:
Horribly off, the wriggling dead-weight reeled,
Rushed to the bottom and lay ruined there.
Though still at the pit's mouth, despite the smoke
O' the burning, tarriers turned again to talk
And trim the balance, and detect at least
A touch of wolf in what showed whitest sheep,
A cross of sheep redeeming the whole wolf, —
Vex truth a little longer: — less and less,
Because years came and went, and more and more
Brought new lies with them to be loved in turn.
Till all at once the memory of the thing, —
The fact that, wolves or sheep, such creatures were, —
Which hitherto, however men supposed,
Had somehow plain and pillar-like prevailed
I' the midst of them, indisputably fact,

Granite, time's tooth should grate against, not graze, —
Why, this proved sandstone, friable, fast to fly
And give its grain away at wish o' the wind.
Ever and ever more diminutive,
Base gone, shaft lost, only entablature,
Dwindled into no bigger than a book,
Lay of the column; and that little, left
By the roadside 'mid the ordure, shards and weeds.
Until I haply, wandering that lone way,
Kicked it up, turned it over, and recognized,
For all the crumblement, this abacus,
This square old yellow book, — could calculate
By this the lost proportions of the style.

This was it from, my fancy with those facts,
I used to tell the tale, turned gay to grave,
But lacked a listener seldom; such alloy,
Such substance of me interfused the gold
Which, wrought into a shapely ring therewith,
Hammered and filed, fingered and favored, last
Lay ready for the renovating wash
O' the water. "How much of the tale was true?"
I disappeared; the book grew all in all;
The lawyers' pleadings swelled back to their size, —
Doubled in two, the crease upon them yet,
For more commodity of carriage, see! —
And these are letters, veritable sheets
That brought post-haste the news to Florence, writ
At Rome the day Count Guido died, we find,
To stay the craving of a client there,
Who bound the same and so produced my book.
Lovers of dead truth, did ye fare the worse?
Lovers of live truth, found ye false my tale?

Well, now; there 's nothing in nor out o' the world
Good except truth: yet this, the something else,
What 's this then, which proves good yet seems untrue?
This that I mixed with truth, motions of mine
That quickened, made the inertness malleolable
O' the gold was not mine, — what 's your name for this?
Are means to the end, themselves in part the end?
Is fiction which makes fact alive, fact too?
The somehow may be thishow.

I find first
Writ down for very A B C of fact,
"In the beginning God made heaven and earth;"

From which, no matter with what lisp, I spell
And speak you out a consequence — that man,
Man, — as befits the made, the inferior thing, —
Purposed, since made, to grow, not make in turn,
Yet forced to try and make, else fail to grow, —
Formed to rise, reach at, if not grasp and gain
The good beyond him, — which attempt is growth, —
Repeats God's process in man's due degree,
Attaining man's proportionate result, —
Creates, no, but resuscitates, perhaps.
Inalienable, the arch-prerogative
Which turns thought, act — conceives, expresses too!
No less, man, bounded, yearning to be free,
May so project his surplusage of soul
In search of body, so add self to self
By owning what lay ownerless before, —
So find, so fill full, so appropriate forms —
That, although nothing which had never life
Shall get life from him, be, not having been,
Yet, something dead may get to live again,
Something with too much life or not enough,
Which, either way imperfect, ended once:
An end whereat man's impulse intervenes,
Makes new beginning, starts the dead alive,
Completes the incomplete and saves the thing.
Man's breath were vain to light a virgin wick, —
Half-burned-out, all but quite-quenched wicks o' the lamp
Stationed for temple-service on this earth,
These indeed let him breathe on and relume!
For such man's feat is, in the due degree,
— Mimic creation, galvanism for life,
But still a glory portioned in the scale.
Why did the mage say — feeling as we are wont
For truth, and stopping midway short of truth,
And resting on a lie — "I raise a ghost"?
"Because," he taught adepts, "man makes not man.
Yet by a special gift, an art of arts,
More insight and more outsight and much more
Will to use both of these than boast my mates,
I can detach from me, commission forth
Half of my soul; which in its pilgrimage
O'er old unwandered waste ways of the world,
May chance upon some fragment of a whole,
Rag of flesh, scrap of bone in dim disuse,
Smoking flax that fed fire once: prompt therein
I enter, spark-like, put old powers to play,

Push lines out to the limit, lead forth last
(By a moonrise through a ruin of a crypt)
What shall be mistily seen, murmuringly heard,
Mistakenly felt: then write my name with Faust's!"
Oh, Faust, why Faust? Was not Elisha once?—
Who bade them lay his staff on a corpse-face.
There was no voice, no hearing: he went in
Therefore, and shut the door upon them twain,
And prayed unto the Lord: and he went up
And lay upon the corpse, dead on the couch,
And put his mouth upon its mouth, his eyes
Upon its eyes, his hands upon its hands,
And stretched him on the flesh; the flesh waxed warm:
And he returned, walked to and fro the house,
And went up, stretched him on the flesh again,
And the eyes opened. 'T is a credible feat
With the right man and way.

Enough of me!
The Book! I turn its medicinable leaves
In London now till, as in Florence erst,
A spirit laughs and leaps through every limb,
And lights my eye, and lifts me by the hair,
Letting me have my will again with these
— How title I the dead alive once more?

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine,
Descended of an ancient house, though poor,
A beak-nosed bushy-bearded black-haired lord,
Lean, pallid, low of stature yet robust,
Fifty years old,—having four years ago
Married Pompilia Comparini, young,
Good, beautiful, at Rome, where she was born,
And brought her to Arezzo, where they lived
Unhappy lives, whatever curse the cause,—
This husband, taking four accomplices,
Followed this wife to Rome, where she was fled
From their Arezzo to find peace again,
In convoy, eight months earlier, of a priest,
Aretine also, of still nobler birth,
Giuseppe Caponsacchi,—caught her there
Quiet in a villa on a Christmas night,
With only Pietro and Violante by,
Both her putative parents; killed the three,
Aged, they, seventy each, and she, seventeen,
And, two weeks since, the mother of his babe

First-born and heir to what the style was worth
O' the Guido who determined, dared and did
This deed just as he purposed point by point.
Then, bent upon escape, but hotly pressed,
And captured with his co-mates that same night,
He, brought to trial, stood on this defence —
Injury to his honor caused the act;
And since his wife was false, (as manifest
By flight from home in such companionship,)
Death, punishment deserved of the false wife
And faithless parents who abetted her
I' the flight aforesaid, wronged nor God nor man.
"Nor false she, nor yet faithless they," replied
The accuser; "cloaked and masked this murder glooms;
True was Pompilia, loyal too the pair;
Out of the man's own heart a monster curled,
Which — crime coiled with connivancy at crime —
His victim's breast, he tells you, hatched and reared;
Uncoil we and stretch stark the worm of hell!"
A month the trial swayed this way and that
Ere judgment settled down on Guido's guilt;
Then was the Pope, that good Twelfth Innocent,
Appealed to: who well weighed what went before,
Affirmed the guilt and gave the guilty doom.

Let this old woe step on the stage again!
Act itself o'er anew for men to judge,
Not by the very sense and sight indeed —
(Which take at best imperfect cognizance,
Since, how heart moves brain, and how both move hand,
What mortal ever in entirety saw?)
— No dose of purer truth than man digests,
But truth with falsehood, milk that feeds him now,
Not strong meat he may get to bear some day —
To wit, by voices we call evidence,
Uproar in the echo, live fact deadened down,
Talked over, bruited abroad, whispered away,
Yet helping us to all we seem to hear:
For how else know we save by worth of word?

Here are the voices presently shall sound
In due succession. First, the world's outcry
Around the rush and ripple of any fact
Fallen stonewise, plumb on the smooth face of things;
The world's guess, as it crowds the bank o' the pool,
At what were figure and substance, by their splash:

Then, by vibrations in the general mind,
At depth of deed already out of reach.
This threefold murder of the day before, —
Say, Half-Rome 's feel after the vanished truth;
Honest enough, as the way is: all the same,
Harboring in the centre of its sense
A hidden germ of failure, shy but sure,
To neutralize that honesty and leave
That feel for truth at fault, as the way is too.
Some prepossession such as starts amiss,
By but a hair's breadth at the shoulder-blade,
The arm o' the feeler, dip he ne'er so bold;
So leads arm waveringly, lets fall wide
O' the mark its finger, sent to find and fix
Truth at the bottom, that deceptive speck.
With this Half-Rome, — the source of swerving, call
Over-belief in Guido's right and wrong
Rather than in Pompilia's wrong and right:
Who shall say how, who shall say why? 'Tis there —
The instinctive theorizing whence a fact
Looks to the eye as the eye likes the look.
Gossip in a public place, a sample-speech.
Some worthy, with his previous hint to find
A husband's side the safer, and no whit
Aware he is not Æacus the while, —
How such an one supposes and states fact
To whosoever of a multitude
Will listen, and perhaps prolong thereby
The not-unpleasant flutter at the breast,
Born of a certain spectacle shut in
By the church Lorenzo opposite. So, they lounge
Midway the mouth o' the street, on Corso side,
'Twixt palace Fiano and palace Ruspoli,
Linger and listen; keeping clear o' the crowd,
Yet wishful one could lend that crowd one's eyes,
(So universal is its plague of squint)
And make hearts beat our time that flutter false:
— All for the truth's sake, mere truth, nothing else!
How Half-Rome found for Guido much excuse.

Next, from Rome's other half, the opposite feel
For truth with a like swerve, like unsuccess, —
Or if success, by no skill but more luck.
This time, through siding rather with the wife
Because a fancy-fit inclined that way,
Than with the husband. One wears drab, one pink

Who wears pink, ask him "Which shall win the race,
Of coupled runners like as egg and egg?"
"— Why, if I must choose, he with the pink scarf."
Doubtless for some such reason choice fell here.
A piece of public talk to correspond
At the next stage of the story; just a day
Let pass and new day brings the proper change.
Another sample-speech i' the market-place
O' the Barberini by the Capucins;
Where the old Triton, at his fountain-sport,
Bernini's creature plated to the paps,
Puffs up steel sleet which breaks to diamond dust,
A spray of sparkles snorted from his conch,
High over the caritellas, out o' the way
O' the motley merchandizing multitude.
Our murder has been done three days ago,
The frost is over and gone, the south wind laughs,
And, to the very tiles of each red roof
A-smoke i' the sunshine, Rome lies gold and glad:
So, listen how, to the other half of Rome,
Pompilia seemed a saint and martyr both!

Then, yet another day let come and go,
With pause prelusive still of novelty,
Hear a fresh speaker! — neither this nor that
Half-Rome aforesaid; something bred of both:
One and one breed the inevitable three.
Such is the personage harangues you next;
The elaborated product, *tertium quid:*
Rome's first commotion in subsidence gives
The curd o' the cream, flower o' the wheat, as it were,
And finer sense o' the city. Is this plain?
You get a reasoned statement of the case,
Eventual verdict of the curious few
Who care to sift a business to the bran
Nor coarsely bolt it like the simpler sort.
Here, after ignorance, instruction speaks;
Here, clarity of candor, history's soul,
The critical mind, in short: no gossip-guess.
What the superior social section thinks,
In person of some man of quality
Who — breathing musk from lace-work and brocade,
His solitaire amid the flow of frill,
Powdered peruke on nose, and bag at back,
And cane dependent from the ruffled wrist —
Harangues in silvery and selectest phrase

'Neath waxlight in a glorified saloon
Where mirrors multiply the girandole:
Courting the approbation of no mob,
But Eminence This and All-Illustrious That
Who take snuff softly, range in well-bred ring,
Card-table-quitters for observance' sake,
Around the argument, the rational word —
Still, spite its weight and worth, a sample-speech.
How Quality dissertated on the case.

So much for Rome and rumor; smoke comes first:
Once let smoke rise untroubled, we descry
Clearlier what tongues of flame may spire and spit
To eye and ear, each with appropriate tinge
According to its food, or pure or foul.
The actors, no mere rumors of the act,
Intervene. First you hear Count Guido's voice,
In a small chamber that adjoins the court,
Where Governor and Judges, summoned thence,
Tommati, Venturini and the rest,
Find the accused ripe for declaring truth.
Soft-cushioned sits he; yet shifts seat, shirks touch,
As, with a twitchy brow and wincing lip
And cheek that changes to all kinds of white,
He proffers his defence, in tones subdued
Near to mock-mildness now, so mournful seems
The obtuser sense truth fails to satisfy;
Now, moved, from pathos at the wrong endured,
To passion; for the natural man is roused
At fools who first do wrong, then pour the blame
Of their wrong-doing, Satan-like, on Job.
Also his tongue at times is hard to curb;
Incisive, nigh satiric bites the phrase,
Rough-raw, yet somehow claiming privilege
— It is so hard for shrewdness to admit
Folly means no harm when she calls black white!
— Eruption momentary at the most,
Modified forthwith by a fall o' the fire,
Sage acquiescence; for the world 's the world,
And, what it errs in, Judges rectify:
He feels he has a fist, then folds his arms
Crosswise and makes his mind up to be meek.
And never once does he detach his eye
From those ranged there to slay him or to save,
But does his best man's-service for himself,
Despite, — what twitches brow and makes lip wince, —

His limbs' late taste of what was called the Cord,
Or Vigil-torture more facetiously.
Even so; they were wont to tease the truth
Out of loath witness (toying, trifling time)
By torture: 't was a trick, a vice of the age,
Here, there and everywhere, what would you have?
Religion used to tell Humanity
She gave him warrant or denied him course.
And since the course was much to his own mind,
Of pinching flesh and pulling bone from bone
To unhusk truth a-hiding in its hulls,
Nor whisper of a warning stopped the way,
He, in their joint behalf, the burly slave,
Bestirred him, mauled and maimed all recusants,
While, prim in place, Religion overlooked;
And so had done till doomsday, never a sign
Nor sound of interference from her mouth,
But that at last the burly slave wiped brow,
Let eye give notice as if soul were there,
Muttered "'T is a vile trick, foolish more than vile,
Should have been counted sin; I make it so:
At any rate no more of it for me —
Nay, for I break the torture-engine thus!"
Then did Religion start up, stare amain,
Look round for help and see none, smile and say
"What, broken is the rack? Well done of thee!
Did I forget to abrogate its use?
Be the mistake in common with us both!
— One more fault our blind age shall answer for,
Down in my book denounced though it must be
Somewhere. Henceforth find truth by milder means!"
Ah but, Religion, did we wait for thee
To ope the book, that serves to sit upon,
And pick such place out, we should wait indeed!
That is all history: and what is not now,
Was then, defendants found it to their cost.
How Guido, after being tortured, spoke.

Also hear Caponsacchi who comes next,
Man and priest — could you comprehend the coil! —
In days when that was rife which now is rare.
How, mingling each its multifarious wires,
Now heaven, now earth, now heaven and earth at once,
Had plucked at and perplexed their puppet here,
Played off the young frank personable priest;
Sworn fast and tonsured plain heaven's celibate,

And yet earth's clear-accepted servitor,
A courtly spiritual Cupid, squire of dames
By law of love and mandate of the mode.
The Church's own, or why parade her seal,
Wherefore that chrism and consecrative work?
Yet verily the world's, or why go badged
A prince of sonneteers and lutanists,
Show color of each vanity in vogue
Borne with decorum due on blameless breast?
All that is changed now, as he tells the court
How he had played the part excepted at;
Tells it, moreover, now the second time:
Since, for his cause of scandal, his own share
I' the flight from home and husband of the wife,
He has been censured, punished in a sort
By relegation, — exile, we should say,
To a short distance for a little time, —
Whence he is summoned on a sudden now,
Informed that she, he thought to save, is lost,
And, in a breath, bidden re-tell his tale,
Since the first telling somehow missed effect,
And then advise in the matter. There stands he,
While the same grim black-panelled chamber blinks
As though rubbed shiny with the sins of Rome
Told the same oak for ages — wave-washed wall
Against which sets a sea of wickedness.
There, where you yesterday heard Guido speak,
Speaks Caponsacchi; and there face him too
Tommati, Venturini and the rest
Who, eight months earlier, scarce repressed the smile,
Forewent the wink; waived recognition so
Of peccadillos incident to youth,
Especially youth high-born; for youth means love,
Vows can't change nature, priests are only men,
And love likes stratagem and subterfuge:
Which age, that once was youth, should recognize,
May blame, but needs not press too hard upon.
Here sit the old Judges then, but with no grace
Of reverend carriage, magisterial port.
For why? The accused of eight months since, — the same
Who cut the conscious figure of a fool,
Changed countenance, dropped bashful gaze to ground,
While hesitating for an answer then, —
Now is grown judge himself, terrifies now
This, now the other culprit called a judge,
Whose turn it is to stammer and look strange,

As he speaks rapidly, angrily, speech that smites:
And they keep silence, bear blow after blow,
Because the seeming-solitary man,
Speaking for God, may have an audience too,
Invisible, no discreet judge provokes.
How the priest Caponsacchi said his say.

Then a soul sighs its lowest and its last
After the loud ones, — so much breath remains
Unused by the four-days'-dying; for she lived
Thus long, miraculously long, 't was thought,
Just that Pompilia might defend herself.
How, while the hireling and the alien stoop,
Comfort, yet question, — since the time is brief,
And folk, allowably inquisitive,
Encircle the low pallet where she lies
In the good house that helps the poor to die, —
Pompilia tells the story of her life.
For friend and lover, — leech and man of law
Do service; busy helpful ministrants
As varied in their calling as their mind,
Temper and age: and yet from all of these,
About the white bed under the arched roof,
Is somehow, as it were, evolved a one, —
Small separate sympathies combined and large,
Nothings that were, grown something very much:
As if the bystanders gave each his straw,
All he had, though a trifle in itself,
Which, plaited all together, made a Cross
Fit to die looking on and praying with,
Just as well as if ivory or gold.
So, to the common kindliness she speaks,
There being scarce more privacy at the last
For mind than body: but she is used to bear,
And only unused to the brotherly look.
How she endeavored to explain her life.

Then, since a Trial ensued, a touch o' the same
To sober us, flustered with frothy talk,
And teach our common sense its helplessness.
For why deal simply with divining-rod,
Scrape where we fancy secret sources flow,
And ignore law, the recognized machine,
Elaborate display of pipe and wheel
Framed to unchoke, pump up and pour apace
Truth till a flowery foam shall wash the world?

The patent truth-extracting process, — ha?
Let us make that grave mystery turn one wheel.
Give you a single grind of law at least!
One orator, of two on either side,
Shall teach us the puissance of the tongue
— That is, o' the pen which simulated tongue
On paper and saved all except the sound
Which never was. Law's speech beside law's thought?
That were too stunning, too immense an odds:
That point of vantage law lets nobly pass.
One lawyer shall admit us to behold
The manner of the making out a case,
First fashion of a speech; the chick in egg,
The masterpiece law's bosom incubates.
How Don Giacinto of the Arcangeli,
Called Procurator of the Poor at Rome,
Now advocate for Guido and his mates, —
The jolly learned man of middle age,
Cheek and jowl all in laps with fat and law,
Mirthful as mighty, yet, as great hearts use,
Despite the name and fame that tempt our flesh,
Constant to that devotion of the hearth,
Still captive in those dear domestic ties! —
How he, — having a cause to triumph with,
All kind of interests to keep intact,
More than one efficacious personage
To tranquillize, conciliate and secure,
And above all, public anxiety
To quiet, show its Guido in good hands, —
Also, as if such burdens were too light,
A certain family-feast to claim his care,
The birthday-banquet for the only son —
Paternity at smiling strife with law —
How he brings both to buckle in one bond;
And, thick at throat, with waterish under-eye,
Turns to his task and settles in his seat
And puts his utmost means in practice now:
Wheezes out law-phrase, whiffles Latin forth,
And, just as though roast lamb would never be,
Makes logic levigate the big crime small:
Rubs palm on palm, rakes foot with itchy foot,
Conceives and inchoates the argument,
Sprinkling each flower appropriate to the time,
— Ovidian quip or Ciceronian crank,
A-bubble in the larynx while he laughs,
As he had fritters deep down frying there.

How he turns, twists, and tries the oily thing
Shall be — first speech for Guido 'gainst the Fisc.
Then with a skip as it were from heel to head,
Leaving yourselves fill up the middle bulk
O' the Trial, reconstruct its shape august,
From such exordium clap we to the close;
Give you, if we dare wing to such a height,
The absolute glory in some full-grown speech
On the other side, some finished butterfly,
Some breathing diamond-flake with leaf-gold fans,
That takes the air, no trace of worm it was,
Or cabbage-bed it had production from.
Giovambattista o' the Bottini, Fisc,
Pompilia's patron by the chance of the hour,
To-morrow her persecutor, — composite, he,
As becomes who must meet such various calls —
Odds of age joined in him with ends of youth.
A man of ready smile and facile tear,
Improvised hopes, despairs at nod and beck,
And language — ah, the gift of eloquence!
Language that goes, goes, easy as a glove,
O'er good and evil, smoothens both to one.
Rashness helps caution with him, fires the straw,
In free enthusiastic careless fit,
On the first proper pinnacle of rock
Which offers, as reward for all that zeal,
To lure some bark to founder and bring gain:
While calm sits Caution, rapt with heavenward eye,
A true confessor's gaze, amid the glare
Beaconing to the breaker, death and hell.
"Well done, thou good and faithful!" she approves:
"Hadst thou let slip a fagot to the beach,
The crew might surely spy thy precipice
And save their boat; the simple and the slow
Might so, forsooth, forestall the wrecker's fee!
Let the next crew be wise and hail in time!"
Just so compounded is the outside man,
Blue juvenile pure eye and pippin cheek,
And brow all prematurely soiled and seamed
With sudden age, bright devastated hair.
Ah, but you miss the very tones o' the voice,
The scrannel pipe that screams in heights of head,
As, in his modest studio, all alone,
The tall wight stands a-tiptoe, strives and strains,
Both eyes shut, like the cockerel that would crow,
Tries to his own self amorously o'er

What never will be uttered else than so —
Since to the four walls, Forum and Mars' Hill,
Speaks out the poesy which, penned, turns prose.
Clavecinist debarred his instrument,
He yet thrums — shirking neither turn nor trill,
With desperate finger on dumb table-edge —
The sovereign rondo, shall conclude his *Suite*,
Charm an imaginary audience there,
From old Corelli to young Haendel, both
I' the flesh at Rome, ere he perforce go print
The cold black score, mere music for the mind —
The last speech against Guido and his gang,
With special end to prove Pompilia pure.
How the Fisc vindicates Pompilia's fame.
Then comes the all but end, the ultimate
Judgment save yours. Pope Innocent the Twelfth,
Simple, sagacious, mild yet resolute,
With prudence, probity and — what beside
From the other world he feels impress at times,
Having attained to fourscore years and six, —
How, when the court found Guido and the rest
Guilty, but law supplied a subterfuge
And passed the final sentence to the Pope,
He, bringing his intelligence to bear
This last time on what ball behoves him drop
In the urn, or white or black, does drop a black,
Send five souls more to just precede his own,
Stand him in stead and witness, if need were,
How he is wont to do God's work on earth.
The manner of his sitting out the dim
Droop of a sombre February day
In the plain closet where he does such work,
With, from all Peter's treasury, one stool,
One table and one lathen crucifix.
There sits the Pope, his thoughts for company;
Grave but not sad, — nay, something like a cheer
Leaves the lips free to be benevolent,
Which, all day long, did duty firm and fast.
A cherishing there is of foot and knee,
A chafing loose-skinned large-veined hand with hand, —
What steward but knows when stewardship earns its wage,
May levy praise, anticipate the lord?
He reads, notes, lays the papers down at last,
Muses, then takes a turn about the room;
Unclasps a huge tome in an antique guise,
Primitive print and tongue half obsolete,

That stands him in diurnal stead; opes page,
Finds place where falls the passage to be conned
According to an order long in use:
And, as he comes upon the evening's chance,
Starts somewhat, solemnizes straight his smile,
Then reads aloud that portion first to last,
And at the end lets flow his own thoughts forth
Likewise aloud, for respite and relief,
Till by the dreary relics of the west
Wan through the half-moon window, all his light,
He bows the head while the lips move in prayer,
Writes some three brief lines, signs and seals the same,
Tinkles a hand-bell, bids the obsequious Sir
Who puts foot presently o' the closet-sill
He watched outside of, bear as superscribed
That mandate to the Governor forthwith:
Then heaves abroad his cares in one good sigh,
Traverses corridor with no arm's help,
And so to sup as a clear conscience should.
The manner of the judgment of the Pope.

Then must speak Guido yet a second time,
Satan's old saw being apt here — skin for skin,
All a man hath that will he give for life.
While life was graspable and gainable,
And bird-like buzzed her wings round Guido's brow,
Not much truth stiffened out the web of words
He wove to catch her: when away she flew
And death came, death's breath rivelled up the lies,
Left bare the metal thread, the fibre fine
Of truth, i' the spinning: the true words shone last.
How Guido, to another purpose quite,
Speaks and despairs, the last night of his life,
In that New Prison by Castle Angelo
At the bridge-foot: the same man, another voice.
On a stone bench in a close fetid cell,
Where the hot vapor of an agony,
Struck into drops on the cold wall, runs down —
Horrible worms made out of sweat and tears —
There crouch, wellnigh to the knees in dungeon-straw
Lit by the sole lamp suffered for their sake,
Two awe-struck figures, this a Cardinal,
That an Abate, both of old styled friends
O' the thing part man part monster in the midst,
So changed is Franceschini's gentle blood.
The tiger-cat screams now, that whined before,

That pried and tried and trod so gingerly,
Till in its silkiness the trap-teeth joined;
Then you know how the bristling fury foams.
They listen, this wrapped in his folds of red,
While his feet fumble for the filth below;
The other, as beseems a stouter heart,
Working his best with beads and cross to ban
The enemy that comes in like a flood
Spite of the standard set up, verily
And in no trope at all, against him there:
For at the prison-gate, just a few steps
Outside, already, in the doubtful dawn,
Thither, from this side and from that, slow sweep
And settle down in silence solidly,
Crow-wise, the frightful Brotherhood of Death.
Black-hatted and black-hooded huddle they,
Black rosaries a-dangling from each waist;
So take they their grim station at the door,
Torches lit, skull-and-cross-bones-banner spread,
And that gigantic Christ with open arms,
Grounded. Nor lacks there aught but that the group
Break forth, intone the lamentable psalm,
"Out of the deeps, Lord, have I cried to thee!"—
When inside, from the true profound, a sign
Shall bear intelligence that the foe is foiled,
Count Guido Franceschini has confessed,
And is absolved and reconciled with God.
Then they, intoning, may begin their march,
Make by the longest way for the People's Square,
Carry the criminal to his crime's award:
A mob to cleave, a scaffolding to reach,
Two gallows and Mannaia crowning all.
How Guido made defence a second time.

Finally, even as thus by step and step
I led you from the level of to-day
Up to the summit of so long ago,
Here, whence I point you the wide prospect round—
Let me, by like steps, slope you back to smooth,
Land you on mother-earth, no whit the worse,
To feed o' the fat o' the furrow: free to dwell,
Taste our time's better things profusely spread
For all who love the level, corn and wine,
Much cattle and the many-folded fleece.
Shall not my friends go feast again on sward,
Though cognizant of country in the clouds

Higher than wistful eagle's horny eye
Ever unclosed for, 'mid ancestral crags,
When morning broke and Spring was back once more,
And he died, heaven, save by his heart, unreached?
Yet heaven my fancy lifts to, ladder-like, —
As Jack reached, holpen of his beanstalk-rungs!

A novel country: I might make it mine
By choosing which one aspect of the year
Suited mood best, and putting solely that
On panel somewhere in the House of Fame,
Landscaping what I saved, not what I saw:
— Might fix you, whether frost in goblin-time
Startled the moon with his abrupt bright laugh,
Or, August's hair afloat in filmy fire,
She fell, arms wide, face foremost on the world,
Swooned there and so singed out the strength of things.
Thus were abolished Spring and Autumn both,
The land dwarfed to one likeness of the land,
Life cramped corpse-fashion. Rather learn and love
Each facet-flash of the revolving year! —
Red, green and blue that whirl into a white,
The variance now, the eventual unity,
Which make the miracle. See it for yourselves,
This man's act, changeable because alive!
Action now shrouds, nor shows the informing thought;
Man, like a glass ball with a spark a-top,
Out of the magic fire that lurks inside,
Shows one tint at a time to take the eye:
Which, let a finger touch the silent sleep,
Shifted a hair's-breadth shoots you dark for bright,
Suffuses bright with dark, and baffles so
Your sentence absolute for shine or shade.
Once set such orbs, — white styled, black stigmatized, —
A-rolling, see them once on the other side
Your good men and your bad men every one,
From Guido Franceschini to Guy Faux,
Oft would you rub your eyes and change your names.

Such, British Public, ye who like me not,
(God love you!) — whom I yet have labored for,
Perchance more careful whoso runs may read
Than erst when all, it seemed, could read who ran, —
Perchance more careless whoso reads may praise
Than late when he who praised and read and wrote
Was apt to find himself the selfsame me, —

Such labor had such issue, so I wrought
This arc, by furtherance of such alloy,
And so, by one spirt, take away its trace
Till, justifiably golden, rounds my ring.

A ring without a posy, and that ring mine?

O lyric Love, half angel and half bird,
And all a wonder and a wild desire, —
Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,
Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
And sang a kindred soul out to his face, —
Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart —
When the first summons from the darkling earth
Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue,
And bared them of the glory — to drop down,
To toil for man, to suffer or to die, —
This is the same voice: can thy soul know change?
Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help!
Never may I commence my song, my due
To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
Except with bent head and beseeching hand —
That still, despite the distance and the dark,
What was, again may be; some interchange
Of grace, some splendor once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile:
— Never conclude, but raising hand and head
Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
Their utmost up and on, — so blessing back
In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall!

II.

HALF-ROME.

WHAT, you, Sir, come too? (Just the man I 'd meet.)
Be ruled by me and have a care o' the crowd:
This way, while fresh folk go and get their gaze:
I 'll tell you like a book and save your shins.
Fie, what a roaring day we 've had! Whose fault?
Lorenzo in Lucina, — here 's a church
To hold a crowd at need, accommodate
All comers from the Corso! If this crush
Make not its priests ashamed of what they show
For temple-room, don't prick them to draw purse
And down with bricks and mortar, eke us out
The beggarly transept with its bit of apse
Into a decent space for Christian ease,
Why, to-day's lucky pearl is cast to swine.
Listen and estimate the luck they 've had!
(The right man, and I hold him.)
Sir, do you see,
They laid both bodies in the church, this morn
The first thing, on the chancel two steps up,
Behind the little marble balustrade;
Disposed them, Pietro the old murdered fool
To the right of the altar, and his wretched wife
On the other side. In trying to count stabs,
People supposed Violante showed the most,
Till somebody explained us that mistake;
His wounds had been dealt out indifferent where,
But she took all her stabbings in the face,
Since punished thus solely for honor's sake,
Honoris causâ, that 's the proper term.
A delicacy there is, our gallants hold,
When you avenge your honor and only then,
That you disfigure the subject, fray the face,
Not just take life and end, in clownish guise.
It was Violante gave the first offence,
Got therefore the conspicuous punishment:
While Pietro, who helped merely, his mere death

Answered the purpose, so his face went free.
We fancied even, free as you please, that face
Showed itself still intolerably wronged;
Was wrinkled over with resentment yet,
Nor calm at all, as murdered faces use,
Once the worst ended: an indignant air
O' the head there was — 't is said the body turned
Round and away, rolled from Violante's side
Where they had laid it loving-husband-like.
If so, if corpses can be sensitive,
Why did not he roll right down altar-step,
Roll on through nave, roll fairly out of church,
Deprive Lorenzo of the spectacle,
Pay back thus the succession of affronts
Whereto this church had served as theatre?
For see: at that same altar where he lies,
To that same inch of step, was brought the babe
For blessing after baptism, and there styled
Pompilia, and a string of names beside,
By his bad wife, some seventeen years ago,
Who purchased her simply to palm on him,
Flatter his dotage and defraud the heirs.
Wait awhile! Also to this very step
Did this Violante, twelve years afterward,
Bring, the mock-mother, that child-cheat full-grown,
Pompilia, in pursuance of her plot,
And there brave God and man a second time
By linking a new victim to the lie.
There, having made a match unknown to him,
She, still unknown to Pietro, tied the knot
Which nothing cuts except this kind of knife;
Yes, made her daughter, as the girl was held,
Marry a man, and honest man beside,
And man of birth to boot, — clandestinely
Because of this, because of that, because
O' the devil's will to work his worst for once, —
Confident she could top her part at need
And, when her husband must be told in turn,
Ply the wife's trade, play off the sex's trick
And, alternating worry with quiet qualms,
Bravado with submissiveness, prettily fool
Her Pietro into patience: so it proved.
Ay, 't is four years since man and wife they grew,
This Guido Franceschini and this same
Pompilia, foolishly thought, falsely declared
A Comparini and the couple's child:

Just at this altar where, beneath the piece
Of Master Guido Reni, Christ on cross,
Second to nought observable in Rome,
That couple lie now, murdered yestereve.
Even the blind can see a providence here.

From dawn till now that it is growing dusk,
A multitude has flocked and filled the church,
Coming and going, coming back again,
Till to count crazed one. Rome was at the show.
People climbed up the columns, fought for spikes
O' the chapel-rail to perch themselves upon,
Jumped over and so broke the wooden work
Painted like porphyry to deceive the eye;
Serve the priests right! The organ-loft was crammed,
Women were fainting, no few fights ensued,
In short, it was a show repaid your pains:
For, though their room was scant undoubtedly,
Yet they did manage matters, to be just,
A little at this Lorenzo. Body o' me!
I saw a body exposed once . . . never mind!
Enough that here the bodies had their due.
No stinginess in wax, a row all round,
And one big taper at each head and foot.

So, people pushed their way, and took their turn,
Saw, threw their eyes up, crossed themselves, gave place
To pressure from behind, since all the world
Knew the old pair, could talk the tragedy
Over from first to last: Pompilia too,
Those who had known her — what 't was worth to them!
Guido's acquaintance was in less request;
The Count had lounged somewhat too long in Rome,
Made himself cheap; with him were hand and glove
Barbers and blear-eyed, as the ancient sings.
Also he is alive and like to be:
Had he considerately died, — aha!
I jostled Luca Cini on his staff,
Mute in the midst, the whole man one amaze,
Staring amain and crossing brow and breast.
"How now?" asked I. "'T is seventy years," quoth he,
"Since I first saw, holding my father's hand,
Bodies set forth: a many have I seen,
Yet all was poor to this I live and see.
Here the world's wickedness seals up the sum:
What with Molinos' doctrine and this deed,

Antichrist surely comes and doomsday 's near.
May I depart in peace, I have seen my see."
"Depart then," I advised, "nor block the road
For youngsters still behindhand with such sights!"
"Why no," rejoins the venerable sire,
"I know it 's horrid, hideous past belief,
Burdensome far beyond what eye can bear;
But they do promise, when Pompilia dies
I' the course o' the day, — and she can't outlive night, —
They 'll bring her body also to expose
Beside the parents, one, two, three abreast;
That were indeed a sight which, might I see,
I trust I should not last to see the like!"
Whereat I bade the senior spare his shanks,
Since doctors give her till to-night to live,
And tell us how the butchery happened. "Ah,
But you can't know!" sighs he, "I 'll not despair:
Beside I'm useful at explaining things —
As, how the dagger laid there at the feet,
Caused the peculiar cuts; I mind its make,
Triangular i' the blade, a Genoese,
Armed with those little hook-teeth on the edge
To open in the flesh nor shut again:
I like to teach a novice: I shall stay!"
And stay he did, and stay be sure he will.

A personage came by the private door
At noon to have his look: I name no names:
Well then, His Eminence the Cardinal,
Whose servitor in honorable sort
Guido was once, the same who made the match,
(Will you have the truth?) whereof we see effect.
No sooner whisper ran he was arrived
Than up pops Curate Carlo, a brisk lad,
Who never lets a good occasion slip,
And volunteers improving the event.
We looked he 'd give the history's self some help,
Treat us to how the wife's confession went
(This morning she confessed her crime, we know)
And, maybe, throw in something of the Priest —
If he 's not ordered back, punished anew,
The gallant, Caponsacchi, Lucifer
I' the garden where Pompilia, Eve-like, lured
Her Adam Guido to his fault and fall.
Think you we got a sprig of speech akin
To this from Carlo, with the Cardinal there?

Too wary he was, too widely awake, I trow.
He did the murder in a dozen words;
Then said that all such outrages crop forth
I' the course of nature, when Molinos' tares
Are sown for wheat, flourish and choke the Church:
So slid on to the abominable sect
And the philosophic sin — we 've heard all that,
And the Cardinal too, (who book-made on the same)
But, for the murder, left it where he found.
Oh but he 's quick, the Curate, minds his game!
And, after all, we have the main o' the fact:
Case could not well be simpler, — mapped, as it were,
We follow the murder's maze from source to sea,
By the red line, past mistake: one sees indeed
Not only how all was and must have been,
But cannot other than be to the end of time.
Turn out here by the Ruspoli! Do you hold
Guido was so prodigiously to blame?
A certain cousin of yours has told you so?
Exactly! Here 's a friend shall set you right,
Let him but have the handsel of your ear.

These wretched Comparini were once gay
And galliard, of the modest middle class:
Born in this quarter seventy years ago,
And married young, they lived the accustomed life,
Citizens as they were of good repute:
And, childless, naturally took their ease
With only their two selves to care about
And use the wealth for: wealthy is the word,
Since Pietro was possessed of house and land —
And specially one house, when good days smiled,
In Via Vittoria, the aspectable street
Where he lived mainly; but another house
Of less pretension did he buy betimes,
The villa, meant for jaunts and jollity,
I' the Pauline district, to be private there —
Just what puts murder in an enemy's head.
Moreover, — here 's the worm i' the core, the germ
O' the rottenness and ruin which arrived, —
He owned some usufruct, had moneys' use
Lifelong, but to determine with his life
In heirs' default: so, Pietro craved an heir,
(The story always old and always new)
Shut his fool's-eyes fast on the visible good
And wealth for certain, opened them owl-wide

On fortune's sole piece of forgetfulness,
The child that should have been and would not be.

Hence, seventeen years ago, conceive his glee
When first Violante, 'twixt a smile and blush,
With touch of agitation proper too,
Announced that, spite of her unpromising age,
The miracle would in time be manifest,
An heir's birth was to happen: and it did.
Somehow or other, — how, all in good time!
By a trick, a sleight of hand you are to hear, —
A child was born, Pompilia, for his joy,
Plaything at once and prop, a fairy-gift,
A saints' grace or, say, grant of the good God, —
A fiddle-pin's end! What imbeciles are we!
Look now: if some one could have prophesied,
"For love of you, for liking to your wife,
I undertake to crush a snake I spy
Settling itself i' the soft of both your breasts.
Give me yon babe to strangle painlessly!
She 'll soar to the safe: you 'll have your crying out,
Then sleep, then wake, then sleep, then end your days
In peace and plenty, mixed with mild regret,
Thirty years hence when Christmas takes old folk" —
How had old Pietro sprung up, crossed himself,
And kicked the conjuror! Whereas you and I,
Being wise with after-wit, had clapped our hands;
Nay, added, in the old fool's interest,
"Strangle the black-eyed babe, so far so good,
But on condition you relieve the man
O' the wife and throttle him Violante too —
She is the mischief!"

We had hit the mark.
She, whose trick brought the babe into the world,
She it was, when the babe was grown a girl,
Judged a new trick should reinforce the old,
Send vigor to the lie now somewhat spent
By twelve years' service; lest Eve's rule decline
Over this Adam of hers, whose cabbage-plot
Throve dubiously since turned fools'-paradise,
Spite of a nightingale on every stump.
Pietro's estate was dwindling day by day,
While he, rapt far above such mundane care,
Crawled all-fours with his baby pick-a-back,
Sat at serene cats'-cradle with his child,

Or took the measured tallness, top to toe,
Of what was grown a great girl twelve years old:
Till sudden at the door a tap discreet,
A visitor's premonitory cough,
And poverty had reached him in her rounds.

This came when he was past the working-time,
Had learned to dandle and forgot to dig,
And who must but Violante cast about,
Contrive and task that head of hers again?
She who had caught one fish, could make that catch
A bigger still, in angler's policy:
So, with an angler's mercy for the bait,
Her minnow was set wriggling on its barb
And tossed to mid-stream; which means, this grown girl
With the great eyes and bounty of black hair
And first crisp youth that tempts a jaded taste,
Was whisked i' the way of a certain man, who snapped.

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine
Was head of an old noble house enough,
Not over-rich, you can't have everything,
But such a man as riches rub against,
Readily stick to, — one with a right to them
Born in the blood: 'twas in his very brow
Always to knit itself against the world,
Beforehand so, when that world stinted due
Service and suit: the world ducks and defers.
As such folks do, he had come up to Rome
To better his fortune, and, since many years,
Was friend and follower of a cardinal;
Waiting the rather thus on providence,
That a shrewd younger poorer brother yet,
The Abate Paolo, a regular priest,
Had long since tried his powers and found he swam
With the deftest on the Galilean pool:
But then he was a web-foot, free o' the wave,
And no ambiguous dab-chick hatched to strut,
Humbled by any fond attempt to swim
When fiercer fowl usurped his dunghill-top —
A whole priest, Paolo, no mere piece of one,
Like Guido tacked thus to the Church's tail!
Guido moreover, as the head o' the house,
Claiming the main prize, not the lesser luck,
The centre lily, no mere chickweed fringe.

He waited and learned waiting, thirty years;
Got promise, missed performance — what would you have?
No petty post rewards a nobleman
For spending youth in splendid lackey-work,
And there 's concurrence for each rarer prize;
When that falls, rougher hand and readier foot
Push aside Guido spite of his black looks.
The end was, Guido, when the warning showed
The first white hair i' the glass, gave up the game,
Determined on returning to his town,
Making the best of bad incurable,
Patching the old palace up and lingering there
The customary life out with his kin,
Where honor helps to spice the scanty bread.

Just as he trimmed his lamp and girt his loins
To go his journey and be wise at home,
In the right mood of disappointed worth,
Who but Violante sudden spied her prey
(Where was I with that angler-simile?)
And threw her bait, Pompilia, where he sulked —
A gleam i' the gloom!

What if he gained thus much,
Wrung out this sweet drop from the bitter Past,
Bore off this rose-bud from the prickly brake
To justify such torn clothes and scratched hands,
And, after all, brought something back from Rome?
Would not a wife serve at Arezzo well
To light the dark house, lend a look of youth
To the mother's face grown meagre, left alone
And famished with the emptiness of hope,
Old Donna Beatrice? Wife you want
Would you play family-representative,
Carry you elder-brotherly, high and right
O'er what may prove the natural petulance
Of the third brother, younger, greedier still,
Girolamo, also a fledgeling priest,
Beginning life in turn with callow beak
Agape for luck, no luck had stopped and stilled.
Such were the pinks and grays about the bait
Persuaded Guido gulp down hook and all.

What constituted him so choice a catch,
You question? Past his prime and poor beside!
Ask that of any she who knows the trade.

Why first, here was a nobleman with friends,
A palace one might run to and be safe
When presently the threatened fate should fall,
A big-browed master to block doorway up,
Parley with people bent on pushing by,
And praying the mild Pietro quick clear scores:
Is birth a privilege and power or no?
Also, — but judge of the result desired,
By the price paid and manner of the sale.
The Count was made woo, win and wed at once:
Asked, and was haled for answer, lest the heat
Should cool, to San Lorenzo, one blind eve,
And had Pompilia put into his arms
O' the sly there, by a hasty candle-blink,
With sanction of some priest-confederate
Properly paid to make short work and sure.

So did old Pietro's daughter change her style
For Guido Franceschini's lady-wife
Ere Guido knew it well; and why this haste
And scramble and indecent secrecy?
Lest Pietro, all the while in ignorance,
Should get to learn, gainsay and break the match:
His peevishness had promptly put aside
Such honor and refused the proffered boon,
Pleased to become authoritative once.
She remedied the wilful man's mistake —"
Did our discreet Violante. Rather say,
Thus did she, lest the object of her game,
Guido the gulled one, give him but a chance,
A moment's respite, time for thinking twice,
Might count the cost before he sold himself,
And try the clink of coin they paid him with.

But coin paid, bargain struck and business done,
Once the clandestine marriage over thus,
All parties made perforce the best o' the fact;
Pietro could play vast indignation off,
Be ignorant and astounded, dupe, poor soul,
Please you, of daughter, wife and son-in-law,
While Guido found himself in flagrant fault,
Must e'en do suit and service, soothe, subdue
A father not unreasonably chafed,
Bring him to terms by paying son's devoir.
Pleasant initiation!

The end, this:
Guido's broad back was saddled to bear all —
Pietro, Violante, and Pompilia too, —
Three lots cast confidently in one lap,
Three dead-weights with one arm to lift the three
Out of their limbo up to life again.
The Roman household was to strike fresh root
In a new soil, graced with a novel name,
Gilt with an alien glory, Aretine
Henceforth and never Roman any more,
By treaty and engagement; thus it ran:
Pompilia's dowry for Pompilia's self
As a thing of course, — she paid her own expense;
No loss nor gain there: but the couple, you see,
They, for their part, turned over first of all
Their fortune in its rags and rottenness
To Guido, fusion and confusion, he
And his with them and theirs, — whatever rag
With coin residuary fell on floor
When Brother Paolo's energetic shake
Should do the relics justice: since 't was thought,
Once vulnerable Pietro out of reach,
That, left at Rome as representative,
The Abate, backed by a potent patron here,
And otherwise with purple flushing him,
Might play a good game with the creditor,
Make up a moiety which, great or small,
Should go to the common stock — if anything,
Guido's, so far repayment of the cost
About to be, — and if, as looked more like,
Nothing, — why, all the nobler cost were his
Who guaranteed, for better or for worse,
To Pietro and Violante, house and home,
Kith and kin, with the pick of company
And life o' the fat o' the land while life should last.
How say you to the bargain at first blush?
Why did a middle-aged not-silly man
Show himself thus besotted all at once?
Quoth Solomon, one black eye does it all.

They went to Arezzo, — Pietro and his spouse,
With just the dusk o' the day of life to spend,
Eager to use the twilight, taste a treat,
Enjoy for once with neither stay nor stint
The luxury of lord-and-lady-ship,
And realize the stuff and nonsense long

A-simmer in their noddles; vent the fume
Born there and bred, the citizen's conceit
How fares nobility while crossing earth,
What rampart or invisible body-guard
Keeps off the taint of common life from such.
They had not fed for nothing on the tales
Of grandees who give banquets worthy Jove,
Spending gold as if Plutus paid a whim,
Served with obeisances as when . . . what God?
I 'm at the end of my tether; 't is enough
You understand what they came primed to see:
While Guido who should minister the sight,
Stay all this qualmish greediness of soul
With apples and with flagons — for his part,
Was set on life diverse as pole from pole:
Lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, — what else
Was he just now awake from, sick and sage,
After the very debauch they would begin? —
Suppose such stuff and nonsense really were.
That bubble, they were bent on blowing big,
He had blown already till he burst his cheeks,
And hence found soapsuds bitter to the tongue.
He hoped now to walk softly all his days
In soberness of spirit, if haply so,
Pinching and paring he might furnish forth
A frugal board, bare sustenance, no more,
Till times, that could not well grow worse, should mend.

Thus minded then, two parties mean to meet
And make each other happy. The first week,
And fancy strikes fact and explodes in full.
"This," shrieked the Comparini, "this the Count,
The palace, the signorial privilege,
The pomp and pageantry were promised us?
For this have we exchanged our liberty,
Our competence, our darling of a child?
To house as spectres in a sepulchre
Under this black stone heap, the street's disgrace,
Grimmest as that is of the gruesome town,
And here pick garbage on a pewter plate,
Or cough at verjuice dripped from earthenware?
Oh Via Vittoria, oh the other place
I' the Pauline, did we give you up for this?
Where 's the foregone housekeeping good and gay,
The neighborliness, the companionship,
The treat and feast when holidays came round,

The daily feast that seemed no treat at all,
Called common by the uncommon fools we were!
Even the sun that used to shine at Rome,
Where is it? Robbed and starved and frozen too,
We will have justice, justice if there be!"
Did not they shout, did not the town resound!
Guido's old lady-mother Beatrice,
Who since her husband, Count Tommaso's death,
Had held sole sway i' the house, — the doited crone
Slow to acknowledge, curtsey and abdicate, —
Was recognized of true novercal type,
Dragon and devil. His brother Girolamo
Came next in order: priest was he? The worse!
No way of winning him to leave his mumps
And help the laugh against old ancestry
And formal habits long since out of date,
Letting his youth be patterned on the mode
Approved of where Violante laid down law.
Or did he brighten up by way of change,
Dispose himself for affability?
The malapert, too complaisant by half
To the alarmed young novice of a bride!
Let him go buzz, betake himself elsewhere,
Nor singe his fly-wings in the candle-flame!

Four months' probation of this purgatory,
Dog-snap and cat-claw, curse and counterblast,
The devil's self were sick of his own din;
And Pietro, after trumpeting huge wrongs
At church and market-place, pillar and post,
Square's corner, street's end, now the palace-step
And now the wine-house bench — while, on her side,
Violante up and down was voluble
In whatsoever pair of ears would perk
From goody, gossip, cater-cousin and sib,
Curious to peep at the inside of things
And catch in the act pretentious poverty
At its wits' end to keep appearance up,
Make both ends meet, — nothing the vulgar loves
Like what this couple pitched them right and left.
Then, their worst done that way, both struck tent, marched
— Renounced their share o' the bargain, flung what dues
Guido was bound to pay, in Guido's face,
Left their hearts'-darling, treasure of the twain
And so forth, the poor inexperienced bride,
To her own devices, bade Arezzo rot,
Cursed life signorial, and sought Rome once more.

I see the comment ready on your lip,
"The better fortune, Guido's — free at least
By this defection of the foolish pair,
He could begin make profit in some sort
Of the young bride and the new quietness,
Lead his own life now, henceforth breathe unplagued."
Could he? You know the sex like Guido's self.
Learn the Violante-nature!

Once in Rome,
By way of helping Guido lead such life,
Her first act to inaugurate return
Was, she got pricked in conscience: Jubilee
Gave her the hint. Our Pope, as kind as just,
Attained his eighty years, announced a boon
Should make us bless the fact, held Jubilee —
Short shrift, prompt pardon for the light offence,
And no rough dealing with the regular crime
So this occasion were not suffered slip —
Otherwise, sins commuted as before,
Without the least abatement in the price.
Now, who had thought it? All this while, it seems,
Our sage Violante had a sin of a sort
She must compound for now or not at all.
Now be the ready riddance! She confessed
Pompilia was a fable not a fact:
She never bore a child in her whole life.
Had this child been a changeling, that were grace
In some degree, exchange is hardly theft,
You take your stand on truth ere leap your lie:
Here was all lie, no touch of truth at all,
All the lie hers — not even Pietro guessed
He was as childless still as twelve years since.
The babe had been a find i' the filth-heap, Sir,
Catch from the kennel! There was found at Rome,
Down in the deepest of our social dregs,
A woman who professed the wanton's trade
Under the requisite thin coverture,
Communis meretrix and washer-wife:
The creature thus conditioned found by chance
Motherhood like a jewel in the muck,
And straightway either trafficked with her prize
Or listened to the tempter and let be, —
Made pact abolishing her place and part
In womankind, beast-fellowship indeed.
She sold this babe eight months before its birth

To our Violante, Pietro's honest spouse,
Well-famed and widely-instanced as that crown
To the husband, virtue in a woman's shape.
She it was, bought, paid for, passed off the thing
As very flesh and blood and child of her
Despite the flagrant fifty years, — and why?
Partly to please old Pietro, fill his cup
With wine at the late hour when lees are left,
And send him from life's feast rejoicingly, —
Partly to cheat the rightful heirs, agape,
Each uncle's cousin's brother's son of him,
For that same principal of the usufruct
It vext him he must die and leave behind.

Such was the sin had come to be confessed.
Which of the tales, the first or last, was true?
Did she so sin once, or, confessing now,
Sin for the first time? Either way you will.
One sees a reason for the cheat: one sees
A reason for a cheat in owning cheat
Where no cheat had been. What of the revenge?
What prompted the contrition all at once,
Made the avowal easy, the shame slight?
Why, prove they but Pompilia not their child,
No child, no dowry! this, supposed their child,
Had claimed what this, shown alien to their blood,
Claimed nowise: Guido's claim was through his wife,
Null then and void with hers. The biter bit,
Do you see! For such repayment of the past,
One might conceive the penitential pair
Ready to bring their case before the courts,
Publish their infamy to all the world
And, arm in arm, go chuckling thence content.

Is this your view? 'T was Guido's anyhow
And colorable: he came forward then,
Protested in his very bride's behalf
Against this lie and all it led to, least
Of all the loss o' the dowry; no! From her
And him alike he would expunge the blot,
Erase the brand of such a bestial birth,
Participate in no hideous heritage
Gathered from the gutter to be garnered up
And glorified in a palace. Peter and Paul!
But that who likes may look upon the pair
Exposed in yonder church, and show his skill

By saying which is eye and which is mouth
Through those stabs thick and threefold, — but for that —
A strong word on the liars and their lie
Might crave expression and obtain it, Sir!
— Though prematurely, since there 's more to come,
More that will shake your confidence in things
Your cousin tells you, — may I be so bold?

This makes the first act of the farce, — anon
The sombre element comes stealing in
Till all is black or blood-red in the piece.
Guido, thus made a laughing-stock abroad,
A proverb for the market-place at home,
Left alone with Pompilia now, this graft
So reputable on his ancient stock,
This plague-seed set to fester his sound flesh,
What does the Count? Revenge him on his wife?
Unfasten at all risks to rid himself
The noisome lazar-badge, fall foul of fate,
And, careless whether the poor rag was ware
O' the part it played, or helped unwittingly,
Bid it go burn and leave his frayed flesh free?
Plainly, did Guido open both doors wide,
Spurn thence the cur-cast creature and clear scores
As man might, tempted in extreme like this?
No, birth and breeding, and compassion too
Saved her such scandal. She was young, he thought,
Not privy to the treason, punished most
I' the proclamation of it; why make her
A party to the crime she suffered by?
Then the black eyes were now her very own,
Not any more Violante's: let her live,
Lose in a new air, under a new sun,
The taint of the imputed parentage
Truly or falsely, take no more the touch
Of Pietro and his partner anyhow!
All might go well yet.

So she thought, herself,
It seems, since what was her first act and deed
When news came how these kindly ones at Rome
Had stripped her naked to amuse the world
With spots here, spots there and spots everywhere?
— For I should tell you that they noised abroad
Not merely the main scandal of her birth,
But slanders written, printed, published wide,

Pamphlets which set forth all the pleasantry
Of how the promised glory was a dream,
The power a bubble, and the wealth — why, dust.
There was a picture, painted to the life,
Of those rare doings, that superlative
Initiation in magnificence
Conferred on a poor Roman family
By favor of Arezzo and her first
And famousest, the Franceschini there.
You had the Countship holding head aloft
Bravely although bespattered, shifts and straits
In keeping out o' the way o' the wheels o' the world,
The comic of those home-contrivances
When the old lady-mother's wit was taxed
To find six clamorous mouths in food more real
Than fruit plucked off the cobwebbed family-tree,
Or acorns shed from its gilt mouldered frame —
Cold glories served up with stale fame for sauce.
What, I ask, — when the drunkenness of hate
Hiccuped return for hospitality,
Befouled the table they had feasted on,
Or say, — God knows I'll not prejudge the case, —
Grievances thus distorted, magnified,
Colored by quarrel into calumny, —
What side did our Pompilia first espouse?
Her first deliberate measure was, she wrote,
Pricked by some loyal impulse, straight to Rome
And her husband's brother the Abate there,
Who, having managed to effect the match,
Might take men's censure for its ill success.
She made a clean breast also in her turn,
And qualified the couple properly,
Since whose departure, hell, she said, was heaven,
And the house, late distracted by their peals,
Quiet as Carmel where the lilies live.
Herself had oftentimes complained: but why?
All her complaints had been their prompting, tales
Trumped up, devices to this very end.
Their game had been to thwart her husband's love
And cross his will, malign his words and ways,
To reach this issue, furnish this pretence
For impudent withdrawal from their bond, —
Theft, indeed murder, since they meant no less
Whose last injunction to her simple self
Had been — what parents'-precept do you think?
That she should follow after with all speed,

Fly from her husband's house clandestinely,
Join them at Rome again, but first of all
Pick up a fresh companion in her flight,
So putting youth and beauty to fit use, —
Some gay dare-devil cloak-and-rapier spark
Capable of adventure, — helped by whom
She, some fine eve when lutes were in the air,
Having put poison in the posset-cup,
Laid hands on money, jewels and the like,
And, to conceal the thing with more effect,
By way of parting benediction too,
Fired the house, — one would finish famously
I' the tumult, slip out, scurry off and away
And turn up merrily at home once more.
Fact this, and not a dream o' the devil, Sir!
And more than this, a fact none dare dispute,
Word for word, such a letter did she write.
And such the Abate read, nor simply read
But gave all Rome to ruminate upon,
In answer to such charges as, I say,
The couple sought to be beforehand with.

The cause thus carried to the courts at Rome,
Guido away, the Abate had no choice
But stand forth, take his absent brother's part,
Defend the honor of himself beside.
He made what head he might against the pair,
Maintained Pompilia's birth legitimate
And all her rights intact — hers, Guido's now:
And so far by his policy turned their flank,
(The enemy being beforehand in the place)
That, — though the courts allowed the cheat for fact,
Suffered Violante to parade her shame,
Publish her infamy to heart's content,
And let the tale o' the feigned birth pass for proved, —
Yet they stopped there, refused to intervene
And dispossess the innocents, befooled
By gifts o' the guilty, at guilt's new caprice.
They would not take away the dowry now
Wrongfully given at first, nor bar at all
Succession to the aforesaid usufruct,
Established on a fraud, nor play the game
Of Pietro's child and now not Pietro's child
As it might suit the gamester's purpose. Thus
Was justice ever ridiculed in Rome:
Such be the double verdicts favored here

Which send away both parties to a suit
Nor puffed up nor cast down, — for each a crumb
Of right, for neither of them the whole loaf.
Whence, on the Comparini's part, appeal —
Counter-appeal on Guido's, — that 's the game:
And so the matter stands, even to this hour,
Bandied as balls are in a tennis-court,
And so might stand, unless some heart broke first,
Till doomsday.

Leave it thus, and now revert
To the old Arezzo whence we moved to Rome.
We 've had enough o' the parents, false or true,
Now for a touch o' the daughter's quality.
The start 's fair henceforth, every obstacle
Out of the young wife's footpath, she 's alone,
Left to walk warily now: how does she walk?
Why, once a dwelling's threshold marked and crossed
In rubric by the enemy on his rounds
As eligible, as fit place of prey,
Baffle him henceforth, keep him out who can!
Stop up the door at the first hint of hoof,
Presently at the window taps a horn,
And Satan 's by your fireside, never fear!
Pompilia, left alone now, found herself;
Found herself young too, sprightly, fair enough,
Matched with a husband old beyond his age
(Though that was something like four times her own)
Because of cares past, present and to come:
Found too the house dull and its inmates dead,
So, looked outside for light and life.

And love
Did in a trice turn up with life and light, —
The man with the aureole, sympathy made flesh,
The all-consoling Caponsacchi, Sir!
A priest — what else should the consoler be?
With goodly shoulderblade and proper leg,
A portly make and a symmetric shape,
And curls that clustered to the tonsure quite.
This was a bishop in the bud, and now
A canon full-blown so far: priest, and priest
Nowise exorbitantly overworked,
The courtly Christian, not so much Saint Paul
As a saint of Cæsar's household: there posed he
Sending his god-glance after his shot shaft,
Apollos turned Apollo, while the snake

Pompilia writhed transfixed through all her spires.
He, not a visitor at Guido's house,
Scarce an acquaintance, but in prime request
With the magnates of Arezzo, was seen here,
Heard there, felt everywhere in Guido's path
If Guido's wife's path be her husband's too.
Now he threw comfits at the theatre
Into her lap, — what harm in Carnival?
Now he pressed close till his foot touched her gown,
His hand brushed hers, — how help on promenade?
And, ever on weighty business, found his steps
Incline to a certain haunt of doubtful fame
Which fronted Guido's palace by mere chance;
While — how do accidents sometimes combine! —
Pompilia chose to cloister up her charms
Just in a chamber that o'erlooked the street,
Sat there to pray, or peep thence at mankind.

This passage of arms and wits amused the town.
At last the husband lifted eyebrow, — bent
On day-book and the study how to wring
Half the due vintage from the worn-out vines
At the villa, tease a quarter the old rent
From the farmstead, tenants swore would tumble soon, —
Pricked up his ear a-singing day and night
With "ruin, ruin;" — and so surprised at last —
Why, what else but a titter? Up he jumps.
Back to mind come those scratchings at the grange,
Prints of the paw about the outhouse; rife
In his head at once again are word and wink,
Mum here and *budget* there, the smell o' the fox,
The musk o' the gallant. "Friends, there 's falseness here!"

The proper help of friends in such a strait
Is waggery, the world over. Laugh him free
O' the regular jealous-fit that 's incident
To all old husbands that wed brisk young wives,
And he 'll go duly docile all his days.
'Somebody courts your wife, Count? Where and when?
How and why? Mere horn-madness: have a care!
Your lady loves her own room, sticks to it,
Locks herself in for hours, you say yourself.
And — what, it 's Caponsacchi means you harm?
The Canon? We caress him, he 's the world's,
A man of such acceptance, — never dream,
Though he were fifty times the fox you fear,

He 'd risk his brush for your particular chick,
When the wide town 's his hen-roost! Fie o' the fool!"
So they dispensed their comfort of a kind.
Guido at last cried, "Something is in the air,
Under the earth, some plot against my peace.
The trouble of eclipse hangs overhead;
How it should come of that officious orb
Your Canon in my system, you must say:
I say — that from the pressure of this spring
Began the chime and interchange of bells,
Ever one whisper, and one whisper more,
And just one whisper for the silvery last,
Till all at once a-row the bronze-throats burst
Into a larum both significant
And sinister: stop it I must and will.
Let Caponsacchi take his hand away
From the wire! — disport himself in other paths
Than lead precisely to my palace-gate, —
Look where he likes except one window's way
Where, cheek on hand, and elbow set on sill,
Happens to lean and say her litanies
Every day and all day long, just my wife —
Or wife and Caponsacchi may fare the worse!"

Admire the man's simplicity. "I 'll do this,
I 'll not have that, I 'll punish and prevent!" —
'T is easy saying. But to a fray, you see,
Two parties go. The badger shows his teeth:
The fox nor lies down sheep-like nor dares fight.
Oh, the wife knew the appropriate warfare well,
The way to put suspicion to the blush!
At first hint of remonstrance, up and out
I' the face of the world, you found her: she could speak,
State her case, — Franceschini was a name,
Guido had his full share of foes and friends —
Why should not she call these to arbitrate?
She bade the Governor do governance,
Cried out on the Archbishop, — why, there now,
Take him for sample! Three successive times
Had he to reconduct her by main force
From where she took her station opposite
His shut door, — on the public steps thereto,
Wringing her hands, when he came out to see,
And shrieking all her wrongs forth at his foot, —
Back to the husband and the house she fled:
Judge if that husband warmed him in the face

Of friends or frowned on foes as heretofore!
Judge if he missed the natural grin of folk,
Or lacked the customary compliment
Of cap and bells, the luckless husband's fit!

So it went on and on till — who was right?
One merry April morning, Guido woke
After the cuckoo, so late, near noonday,
With an inordinate yawning of the jaws,
Ears plugged, eyes gummed together, palate, tongue
And teeth one mud-paste made of poppy-milk;
And found his wife flown, his scritoire the worse
For a rummage, — jewelry that was, was not,
Some money there had made itself wings too, —
The door lay wide and yet the servants slept
Sound as the dead, or dozed which does as well.
In short, Pompilia, she who, candid soul,
Had not so much as spoken all her life
To the Canon, nay, so much as peeped at him
Between her fingers while she prayed in church, —
This lamb-like innocent of fifteen years
(Such she was grown to by this time of day)
Had simply put an opiate in the drink
Of the whole household overnight, and then
Got up and gone about her work secure,
Laid hand on this waif and the other stray,
Spoiled the Philistine and marched out of doors
In company of the Canon who, Lord's love,
What with his daily duty at the church,
Nightly devoir where ladies congregate,
Had something else to mind, assure yourself,
Beside Pompilia, paragon though she be,
Or notice if her nose were sharp or blunt!
Well, anyhow, albeit impossible,
Both of them were together jollily
Jaunting it Rome-ward, half-way there by this,
While Guido was left go and get undrugged,
Gather his wits up, groaningly give thanks
When neighbors crowded round him to condole.
"Ah," quoth a gossip, "well I mind me now,
The Count did always say he thought he felt
He feared as if this very chance might fall!
And when a man of fifty finds his corns
Ache and his joints throb, and foresees a storm,
Though neighbors laugh and say the sky is clear,
Let us henceforth believe him weatherwise!"

Then was the story told, I'll cut you short:
All neighbors knew: no mystery in the world.
The lovers left at nightfall — overnight
Had Caponsacchi come to carry off
Pompilia, — not alone, a friend of his,
One Guillichini, the more conversant
With Guido's housekeeping that he was just
A cousin of Guido's and might play a prank —
(Have not you too a cousin that's a wag?)
— Lord and a Canon also, — what would you have?
Such are the red-clothed milk-swollen poppy-heads
That stand and stiffen 'mid the wheat o' the Church! —
This worthy came to aid, abet his best.
And so the house was ransacked, booty bagged,
The lady led downstairs and out of doors
Guided and guarded till, the city passed,
A carriage lay convenient at the gate.
Good-bye to the friendly Canon; the loving one
Could peradventure do the rest himself.
In jumps Pompilia, after her the priest,
"Whip, driver! Money makes the mare to go,
And we've a bagful. Take the Roman road!"
So said the neighbors. This was eight hours since.

Guido heard all, swore the befitting oaths,
Shook off the relics of his poison-drench,
Got horse, was fairly started in pursuit
With never a friend to follow, found the track
Fast enough, 't was the straight Perugia way,
Trod soon upon their very heels, too late
By a minute only at Camoscia, reached
Chiusi, Foligno, ever the fugitives
Just ahead, just out as he galloped in,
Getting the good news ever fresh and fresh,
Till, lo, at the last stage of all, last post
Before Rome, — as we say, in sight of Rome
And safety (there's impunity at Rome
For priests, you know) at — what's the little place? —
What some call Castelnuovo, some just call
The Osteria, because o' the post-house inn, —
There, at the journey's all but end, it seems,
Triumph deceived them and undid them both,
Secure they might foretaste felicity
Nor fear surprisal: so, they were surprised.
There did they halt at early evening, there
Did Guido overtake them: 't was daybreak;

He came in time enough, not time too much,
Since in the courtyard stood the Canon's self
Urging the drowsy stable-grooms to haste
Harness the horses, have the journey end,
The trifling four-hours' running, so reach Rome.
And the other runaway, the wife? Upstairs,
Still on the couch where she had spent the night,
One couch in one room, and one room for both.
So gained they six hours, so were lost thereby.

Sir, what 's the sequel? Lover and beloved
Fall on their knees? No impudence serves here?
They beat their breasts and beg for easy death,
Confess this, that and the other? — anyhow
Confess there wanted not some likelihood
To the supposition so preposterous,
That, O Pompilia, thy sequestered eyes
Had noticed, straying o'er the prayer-book's edge,
More of the Canon than that black his coat,
Buckled his shoes were, broad his hat of brim:
And that, O Canon, thy religious care
Had breathed too soft a *benedicite*
To banish trouble from a lady's breast
So lonely and so lovely, nor so lean!
This you expect? Indeed, then, much you err.
Not to such ordinary end as this
Had Caponsacchi flung the cassock far,
Doffed the priest, donned the perfect cavalier.
The die was cast: over shoes over boots:
And just as she, I presently shall show,
Pompilia, soon looked Helen to the life,
Recumbent upstairs in her pink and white,
So, in the inn-yard, bold as 't were Troy-town,
There strutted Paris in correct costume,
Cloak, cap and feather, no appointment missed,
Even to a wicked-looking sword at side,
He seemed to find and feel familiar at.
Nor wanted words as ready and as big
As the part he played, the bold abashless one.
"I interposed to save your wife from death,
Yourself from shame, the true and only shame:
Ask your own conscience else! — or, failing that,
What I have done I answer, anywhere,
Here, if you will; you see I have a sword:
Or, since I have a tonsure as you taunt,
At Rome, by all means, — priests to try a priest.

Only, speak where your wife's voice can reply!"
And then he fingered at the sword again.
So, Guido called, in aid and witness both,
The Public Force. The Commissary came,
Officers also; they secured the priest;
Then, for his more confusion, mounted up
With him, a guard on either side, the stair
To the bedroom where still slept or feigned a sleep
His paramour and Guido's wife: in burst
The company and bade her wake and rise.

Her defence? This. She woke, saw, sprang upright
I' the midst and stood as terrible as truth,
Sprang to her husband's side, caught at the sword
That hung there useless, — since they held each hand
O' the lover, had disarmed him properly, —
And in a moment out flew the bright thing
Full in the face of Guido: but for help
O' the guards, who held her back and pinioned her
With pains enough, she had finished you my tale
With a flourish of red all round it, pinked her man
Prettily; but she fought them one to six.
They stopped that, — but her tongue continued free:
She spat forth such invective at her spouse,
O'erfrothed him with such foam of murderer,
Thief, pandar — that the popular tide soon turned,
The favor of the very *sbirri*, straight
Ebbed from the husband, set toward his wife;
People cried "Hands off, pay a priest respect!"
And "persecuting fiend" and "martyred saint"
Began to lead a measure from lip to lip.

But facts are facts and flinch not; stubborn things,
And the question "Prithee, friend, how comes my purse
I' the poke of you?" — admits of no reply.
Here was a priest found out in masquerade,
A wife caught playing truant if no more;
While the Count, mortified in mien enough,
And, nose to face, an added palm in length,
Was plain writ "husband" every piece of him:
Capture once made, release could hardly be.
Beside, the prisoners both made appeal,
"Take us to Rome!"
Taken to Rome they were;
The husband trooping after, piteously,
Tail between legs, no talk of triumph now —

No honor set firm on its feet once more
On two dead bodies of the guilty, — nay,
No dubious salve to honor's broken pate
From chance that, after all, the hurt might seem
A skin-deep matter, scratch that leaves no scar:
For Guido's first search, — ferreting, poor soul,
Here, there and everywhere in the vile place
Abandoned to him when their backs were turned,
Found — furnishing a last and best regale —
All the love-letters bandied 'twixt the pair
Since the first timid trembling into life
O' the love-star till its stand at fiery full.
Mad prose, mad verse, fears, hopes, triumph, despair,
Avowal, disclaimer, plans, dates, names, — was nought
Wanting to prove, if proof consoles at all,
That this had been but the fifth act o' the piece
Whereof the due proemium, months ago,
These playwrights had put forth, and ever since
Matured the middle, added 'neath his nose.
He might go cross himself: the case was clear.

Therefore to Rome with the clear case; there plead
Each party its best, and leave law do each right,
Let law shine forth and show, as God in heaven,
Vice prostrate, virtue pedestalled at last,
The triumph of truth! What else shall glad our gaze
When once authority has knit the brow
And set the brain behind it to decide
Between the wolf and sheep turned litigants?
"This is indeed a business," law shook head:
"A husband charges hard things on a wife,
The wife as hard o' the husband: whose fault here?
A wife that flies her husband's house, does wrong:
The male friend's interference looks amiss,
Lends a suspicion: but suppose the wife,
On the other hand, be jeopardized at home —
Nay, that she simply hold, ill-groundedly,
An apprehension she is jeopardized, —
And further, if the friend partake the fear,
And, in a commendable charity
Which trusteth all, trust her that she mistrusts, —
What do they but obey law — natural law?
Pretence may this be and a cloak for sin,
And circumstances that concur i' the close
Hint as much, loudly — yet scarce loud enough
To drown the answer 'strange may yet be true':

Innocence often looks like guiltiness.
The accused declare that in thought, word and deed,
Innocent were they both from first to last
As male-babe haply laid by female-babe
At church on edge of the baptismal font
Together for a minute, perfect-pure.
Difficult to believe, yet possible,
As witness Joseph, the friend's patron-saint.
The night at the inn — there charity nigh chokes
Ere swallow what they both asseverate;
Though down the gullet faith may feel it go,
When mindful of what flight fatigued the flesh
Out of its faculty and fleshliness,
Subdued it to the soul, as saints assure:
So long a flight necessitates a fall
On the first bed, though in a lion's den,
And the first pillow, though the lion's back:
Difficult to believe, yet possible.
Last come the letters' bundled beastliness —
Authority repugns give glance to — nay,
Turns head, and almost lets her whip-lash fall;
Yet here a voice cries 'Respite!' from the clouds —
The accused, both in a tale, protest, disclaim,
Abominate the horror: 'Not my hand'
Asserts the friend — 'Nor mine' chimes in the wife,
Seeing I have no hand, nor write at all.'
Illiterate — for she goes on to ask,
What if the friend did pen now verse now prose,
Commend it to her notice now and then?
'T was pearls to swine: she read no more than wrote,
And kept no more than read, for as they fell
She ever brushed the burr-like things away,
Or, better, burned them, quenched the fire in smoke.
As for this fardel, filth and foolishness,
She sees it now the first time: burn it too!
While for his part the friend vows ignorance
Alike of what bears his name and bears hers:
'T is forgery, a felon's masterpiece,
And, as 't is said the fox still finds the stench,
Home-manufacture and the husband's work.
Though he confesses, the ingenuous friend,
That certain missives, letters of a sort,
Flighty and feeble, which assigned themselves
To the wife, no less have fallen, far too oft,
In his path: wherefrom he understood just this —
That were they verily the lady's own,

Why, she who penned them, since he never saw
Save for one minute the mere face of her,
Since never had there been the interchange
Of word with word between them all their life,
Why, she must be the fondest of the frail,
And fit, she for the '*apage*' he flung,
Her letters for the flame they went to feed!'
But, now he sees her face and hears her speech,
Much he repents him if, in fancy-freak
For a moment the minutest measurable,
He coupled her with the first flimsy word
O' the self-spun fabric some mean spider-soul
Furnished forth: stop his films and stamp on him!
Never was such a tangled knottiness,
But thus authority cuts the Gordian through,
And mark how her decision suits the need!
Here 's troublesomeness, scandal on both sides,
Plenty of fault to find, no absolute crime:
Let each side own its fault and make amends!
What does a priest in cavalier's attire
Consorting publicly with vagrant wives
In quarters close as the confessional,
Though innocent of harm? 'T is harm enough:
Let him pay it, — say, be relegate a good
Three years, to spend in some place not too far
Nor yet too near, midway 'twixt near and far,
Rome and Arezzo, — Civita we choose,
Where he may lounge away time, live at large,
Find out the proper function of a priest,
Nowise an exile, — that were punishment, —
But one our love thus keeps out of harm's way
Not more from the husband's anger than, mayhap,
His own . . . say, indiscretion, waywardness,
And wanderings when Easter eves grow warm.
For the wife, — well, our best step to take with her,
On her own showing, were to shift her root
From the old cold shade and unhappy soil
Into a generous ground that fronts the south:
Where, since her callow soul, a-shiver late,
Craved simply warmth and called mere passers-by
To the rescue, she should have her fill of shine.
Do house and husband hinder and not help?
Why then, forget both and stay here at peace,
Come into our community, enroll
Herself along with those good Convertites,
Those sinners saved, those Magdalens re-made,

Accept their ministration, well bestow
Her body and patiently possess her soul,
Until we see what better can be done.
Last for the husband: if his tale prove true,
Well is he rid of two domestic plagues —
Both wife that ailed, do whatsoever he would,
And friend of hers that undertook the cure.
See, what a double load we lift from breast!
Off he may go, return, resume old life,
Laugh at the priest here and Pompilia there
In limbo each and punished for their pains,
And grateful tell the inquiring neighborhood —
In Rome, no wrong but has its remedy."
The case was closed. Now, am I fair or no
In what I utter? Do I state the facts,
Having forechosen a side? I promised you!

The Canon Caponsacchi, then, was sent
To change his garb, re-trim his tonsure, tie
The clerkly silk round, every plait correct,
Make the impressive entry on his place
Of relegation, thrill his Civita,
As Ovid, a like sufferer in the cause,
Planted a primrose-patch by Pontus: where, —
What with much culture of the sonnet-stave
And converse with the aborigines,
Soft savagery of eyes unused to roll,
And hearts that all awry went pit-a-pat
And wanted setting right in charity, —
What were a couple of years to while away?
Pompilia, as enjoined, betook herself
To the aforesaid Convertites, soft sisterhood
In Via Lungara, where the light ones live,
Spin, pray, then sing like linnets o'er the flax.
"Anywhere, anyhow, out of my husband's house
Is heaven," cried she, — was therefore suited so.
But for Count Guido Franceschini, he —
The injured man thus righted — found no heaven
I' the house when he returned there, I engage,
Was welcomed by the city turned upside down
In a chorus of inquiry. "What, back — you?
And no wife? Left her with the Penitents?
Ah, being young and pretty, 't were a shame
To have her whipped in public: leave the job
To the priests who understand! Such priests as yours —
(Pontifex Maximus whipped Vestals once)

Our madcap Caponsacchi: think of him!
So, he fired up, showed fight and skill of fence?
Ay, you drew also, but you did not fight!
The wiser, 't is a word and a blow with him,
True Caponsacchi, of old Head-i'-the-Sack
That fought at Fiesole ere Florence was:
He had done enough, to firk you were too much.
And did the little lady menace you,
Make at your breast with your own harmless sword?
The spitfire! Well, thank God you 're safe and sound,
Have kept the sixth commandment whether or no
The lady broke the seventh: I only wish
I were as saint-like, could contain me so.
I, the poor sinner, fear I should have left
Sir Priest no nose-tip to turn up at me!"
You, Sir, who listen but interpose no word,
Ask yourself, had you borne a baiting thus?
Was it enough to make a wise man mad?
Oh, but I 'll have your verdict at the end!

Well, not enough, it seems: such mere hurt falls,
Frets awhile, aches long, then grows less and less,
And so gets done with. Such was not the scheme
O' the pleasant Comparini: on Guido's wound
Ever in due succession, drop by drop,
Came slow distilment from the alembic here
Set on to simmer by Canidian hate,
Corrosives keeping the man's misery raw.
First fire-drop, — when he thought to make the best
O' the bad, to wring from out the sentence passed,
Poor, pitiful, absurd although it were,
Yet what might eke him out result enough
And make it worth while to have had the right
And not the wrong i' the matter judged at Rome.
Inadequate her punishment, no less
Punished in some slight sort his wife had been;
Then, punished for adultery, what else?
On such admitted crime he thought to seize,
And institute procedure in the courts
Which cut corruption of this kind from man,
Cast loose a wife proved loose and castaway:
He claimed in due form a divorce at least.

This claim was met now by a counterclaim:
Pompilia sought divorce from bed and board
Of Guido, whose outrageous cruelty,

Whose mother's malice and whose brother's hate
Were just the white o' the charge, such dreadful depths
Blackened its centre, — hints of worse than hate,
Love from that brother, by that Guido's guile,
That mother's prompting. Such reply was made,
So was the engine loaded, wound up, sprung
On Guido, who received bolt full in breast;
But no less bore up, giddily perhaps.
He had the Abate Paolo still in Rome,
Brother and friend and fighter on his side:
They rallied in a measure, met the foe
Manlike, joined battle in the public courts,
As if to shame supine law from her sloth:
And waiting her award, let beat the while
Arezzo's banter, Rome's buffoonery,
On this ear and on that ear, deaf alike,
Safe from worse outrage. Let a scorpion nip,
And never mind till he contorts his tail!
But there was sting i' the creature; thus it struck.
Guido had thought in his simplicity —
That lying declaration of remorse,
That story of the child which was no child
And motherhood no motherhood at all,
— That even this sin might have its sort of good
Inasmuch as no question more could be, —
Call it false, call the story true, — no claim
Of further parentage pretended now:
The parents had abjured all right, at least,
I' the woman owned his wife: to plead right still
Were to declare the abjuration false:
He was relieved from any fear henceforth
Their hands might touch, their breath defile again
Pompilia with his name upon her yet.
Well, no: the next news was, Pompilia's health
Demanded change after full three long weeks
Spent in devotion with the Sisterhood, —
Which rendered sojourn — so the court opined —
Too irksome, since the convent's walls were high
And windows narrow, nor was air enough
Nor light enough, but all looked prison-like,
The last thing which had come in the court's head.
Propose a new expedient therefore, — this!
She had demanded — had obtained indeed,
By intervention of her pitying friends
Or perhaps lovers — (beauty in distress,
Beauty whose tale is the town-talk beside,

Never lacks friendship's arm about her neck) —
Obtained remission of the penalty,
Permitted transfer to some private place
Where better air, more light, new food might soothe —
Incarcerated (call it, all the same)
At some sure friend's house she must keep inside,
Be found in at requirement fast enough, —
Domus pro carcere, in Roman style.
You keep the house i' the main, as most men do
And all good women: but free otherwise,
Should friends arrive, to lodge them and what not?
And such a *domum*, such a dwelling-place,
Having all Rome to choose from, where chose she?
What house obtained Pompilia's preference?
Why, just the Comparini's — just, do you mark,
Theirs who renounced all part and lot in her
So long as Guido could be robbed thereby,
And only fell back on relationship
And found their daughter safe and sound again
When that might surelier stab him: yes, the pair
Who, as I told you, first had baited hook
With this poor gilded fly Pompilia-thing,
Then caught the fish, pulled Guido to the shore
And gutted him, — now found a further use
For the bait, would trail the gauze wings yet again
I' the way of what new swimmer passed their stand.
They took Pompilia to their hiding-place —
Not in the heart of Rome as formerly,
Under observance, subject to control —
But out o' the way, — or in the way, who knows?
That blind mute villa lurking by the gate
At Via Paulina, not so hard to miss
By the honest eye, easy enough to find
In twilight by marauders: where perchance
Some muffled Caponsacchi might repair,
Employ odd moments when he too tried change,
Found that a friend's abode was pleasanter
Than relegation, penance and the rest.

Come, here 's the last drop does its worst to wound,
Here 's Guido poisoned to the bone, you say,
Your boasted still's full strain and strength: not so!
One master-squeeze from screw shall bring to birth
The hoard i' the heart o' the toad, hell's quintessence.
He learned the true convenience of the change,
And why a convent lacks the cheerful hearts

And helpful hands which female straits require,
When, in the blind mute villa by the gate,
Pompilia — what? sang, danced, saw company?
— Gave birth, Sir, to a child, his son and heir,
Or Guido's heir and Caponsacchi's son.
I want your word now: what do you say to this?
What would say little Arezzo and great Rome,
And what did God say and the devil say
One at each ear o' the man, the husband, now
The father? Why, the overburdened mind
Broke down, what was a brain became a blaze.
In fury of the moment — (that first news
Fell on the Count among his vines, it seems,
Doing his farm-work,) — why, he summoned steward,
Called in the first four hard hands and stout hearts
From field and furrow, poured forth his appeal,
Not to Rome's law and gospel any more,
But this clown with a mother or a wife,
That clodpole with a sister or a son:
And, whereas law and gospel held their peace,
What wonder if the sticks and stones cried out?

All five soon somehow found themselves at Rome,
At the villa door: there was the warmth and light —
The sense of life so just an inch inside —
Some angel must have whispered "One more chance!"

He gave it: bade the others stand aside:
Knocked at the door, — "Who is it knocks?" cried one.
"I will make," surely Guido's angel urged,
"One final essay, last experiment,
Speak the word, name the name from out all names,
Which, if, — as doubtless strong illusions are,
And strange disguisings whereby truth seems false,
And, since I am but man, I dare not do
God's work until assured I see with God, —
If I should bring my lips to breathe that name
And they be innocent, — nay, by one mere touch
Of innocence redeemed from utter guilt, —
That name will bar the door and bid fate pass.
I will not say 'It is a messenger,
A neighbor, even a belated man,
Much less your husband's friend, your husband's self:'
At such appeal the door is bound to ope.
But I will say" — here 's rhetoric and to spare!
Why, Sir, the stumbling-block is cursed and kicked,

Block though it be; the name that brought offence
Will bring offence: the burnt child dreads the fire
Although that fire feed on some taper-wick
Which never left the altar nor singed a fly:
And had a harmless man tripped you by chance,
How would you wait him, stand or step aside,
When next you heard he rolled your way? Enough.

"Giuseppe Caponsacchi!" Guido cried;
And open flew the door: enough again.
Vengeance, you know, burst, like a mountain-wave
That holds a monster in it, over the house,
And wiped its filthy four walls free at last
With a wash of hell-fire, — father, mother, wife,
Killed them all, bathed his name clean in their blood,
And, reeking so, was caught, his friends and he,
Haled hither and imprisoned yesternight
O' the day all this was.
Now, Sir, tale is told,
Of how the old couple come to lie in state
Though hacked to pieces, — never, the expert say,
So thorough a study of stabbing — while the wife
(Viper-like, very difficult to slay)
Writhes still through every ring of her, poor wretch,
At the Hospital hard by — survives, we 'll hope,
To somewhat purify her putrid soul
By full confession, make so much amends
While time lasts; since at day's end die she must.

For Caponsacchi, — why, they 'll have him here,
As hero of the adventure, who so fit
To figure in the coming Carnival?
'T will make the fortune of whate'er saloon
Hears him recount, with helpful cheek, and eye
Hotly indignant now, now dewy-dimmed,
The incidents of flight, pursuit, surprise,
Capture, with hints of kisses all between —
While Guido, wholly unromantic spouse,
No longer fit to laugh at since the blood
Gave the broad farce an all too brutal air,
Why, he and those four luckless friends of his
May tumble in the straw this bitter day —
Laid by the heels i' the New Prison, I hear,
To bide their trial, since trial, and for the life,
Follows if but for form's sake: yes, indeed!

But with a certain issue: no dispute,
"Try him," bids law: formalities oblige:
But as to the issue, — look me in the face! —
If the law thinks to find them guilty, Sir,
Master or men — touch one hair of the five,
Then I say in the name of all that 's left
Of honor in Rome, civility i' the world
Whereof Rome boasts herself the central source, —
There 's an end to all hope of justice more.
Astræa 's gone indeed, let hope go too!
Who is it dares impugn the natural law,
Deny God's word "the faithless wife shall die"?
What, are we blind? How can we fail to learn
This crowd of miseries make the man a mark,
Accumulate on one devoted head
For our example? — yours and mine who read
Its lesson thus — "Henceforward let none dare
Stand, like a natural in the public way,
Letting the very urchins twitch his beard
And tweak his nose, to earn a nickname so,
Be styled male-Grissel or else modern Job!"
Had Guido, in the twinkling of an eye,
Summed up the reckoning, promptly paid himself,
That morning when he came up with the pair
At the wayside inn, — exacted his just debt
By aid of what first mattock, pitchfork, axe
Came to hand in the helpful stable-yard,
And with that axe, if providence so pleased,
Cloven each head, by some Rolando-stroke,
In one clean cut from crown to clavicle,
— Slain the priest-gallant, the wife-paramour,
Sticking, for all defence, in each skull's cleft
The rhyme and reason of the stroke thus dealt,
To wit, those letters and last evidence
Of shame, each package in its proper place, —
Bidding, who pitied, undistend the skulls, —
I say, the world had praised the man. But no!
That were too plain, too straight, too simply just!
He hesitates, calls law forsooth to help.
And law, distasteful to who calls in law
When honor is beforehand and would serve,
What wonder if law hesitate in turn,
Plead her disuse to calls o' the kind, reply
(Smiling a little), "'T is yourself assess
The worth of what 's lost, sum of damage done.
What you touched with so light a finger-tip,

You whose concern it was to grasp the thing,
Why must law gird herself and grapple with?
Law, alien to the actor whose warm blood
Asks heat from law whose veins run lukewarm milk, —
What you dealt lightly with, shall law make out
Heinous forsooth?"
Sir, what's the good of law
In a case o' the kind? None, as she all but says.
Call in law when a neighbor breaks your fence,
Cribs from your field, tampers with rent or lease,
Touches the purse or pocket, — but wooes your wife?
No: take the old way trod when men were men!
Guido preferred the new path, — for his pains,
Stuck in a quagmire, floundered worse and worse
Until he managed somehow scramble back
Into the safe sure rutted road once more,
Revenged his own wrong like a gentleman.
Once back 'mid the familiar prints, no doubt
He made too rash amends for his first fault,
Vaulted too loftily over what barred him late,
And lit i' the mire again, — the common chance,
The natural over-energy: the deed
Maladroit yields three deaths instead of one,
And one life left: for where 's the Canon's corpse?
All which is the worse for Guido, but, be frank —
The better for you and me and all the world,
Husbands of wives, especially in Rome.
The thing is put right, in the old place, — ay,
The rod hangs on its nail behind the door,
Fresh from the brine: a matter I commend
To the notice, during Carnival that's near,
Of a certain what's-his-name and jackanapes
Somewhat too civil of eves with lute and song
About a house here, where I keep a wife.
(You, being his cousin, may go tell him so.)

III.

THE OTHER HALF-ROME.

Another day that finds her living yet,
Little Pompilia, with the patient brow
And lamentable smile on those poor lips,
And, under the white hospital-array,
A flower-like body, to frighten at a bruise
You 'd think, yet now, stabbed through and through again,
Alive i' the ruins. 'T is a miracle.
It seems that, when her husband struck her first,
She prayed Madonna just that she might live
So long as to confess and be absolved;
And whether it was that, all her sad life long
Never before successful in a prayer,
This prayer rose with authority too dread, —
Or whether, because earth was hell to her,
By compensation, when the blackness broke
She got one glimpse of quiet and the cool blue,
To show her for a moment such things were, —
Or else, — as the Augustinian Brother thinks,
The friar who took confession from her lip, —
When a probationary soul that moved
From nobleness to nobleness, as she,
Over the rough way of the world, succumbs,
Bloodies its last thorn with unflinching foot,
The angels love to do their work betimes,
Stanch some wounds here nor leave so much for God.
Who knows? However it be, confessed, absolved,
She lies, with overplus of life beside
To speak and right herself from first to last,
Right the friend also, lamb-pure, lion-brave,
Care for the boy's concerns, to save the son
From the sire, her two-weeks' infant orphaned thus,
And — with best smile of all reserved for him —
Pardon that sire and husband from the heart.
A miracle, so tell your Molinists!

There she lies in the long white lazar-house.
Rome has besieged, these two days, never doubt,

Saint Anna's where she waits her death, to hear
Though but the chink o' the bell, turn o' the hinge
When the reluctant wicket opes at last,
Lets in, on now this and now that pretence,
Too many by half, — complain the men of art, —
For a patient in such plight. The lawyers first
Paid the due visit — justice must be done;
They took her witness, why the murder was.
Then the priests followed properly, — a soul
To shrive; 't was Brother Celestine's own right,
The same who noises thus her gifts abroad.
But many more, who found they were old friends,
Pushed in to have their stare and take their talk
And go forth boasting of it and to boast.
Old Monna Baldi chatters like a jay,
Swears — but that, prematurely trundled out
Just as she felt the benefit begin,
The miracle was snapped up by somebody, —
Her palsied limb 'gan prick and promise life
At touch o' the bedclothes merely, — how much more
Had she but brushed the body as she tried!
Cavalier Carlo — well, there 's some excuse
For him — Maratta who paints Virgins so —
He too must fee the porter and slip by
With pencil cut and paper squared, and straight
There was he figuring away at face:
"A lovelier face is not in Rome," cried he,
"Shaped like a peacock's egg, the pure as pearl,
That hatches you anon a snow-white chick."
Then, oh that pair of eyes, that pendent hair,
Black this and black the other! Mighty fine —
But nobody cared ask to paint the same,
Nor grew a poet over hair and eyes
Four little years ago, when, ask and have,
The woman who wakes all this rapture leaned
Flower-like from out her window long enough,
As much uncomplimented as uncropped
By comers and goers in Via Vittoria: eh?
'T is just a flower's fate: past parterre we trip,
Till peradventure some one plucks our sleeve —
"Yon blossom at the brier's end, that 's the rose
Two jealous people fought for yesterday
And killed each other: see, there 's undisturbed
A pretty pool at the root, of rival red!"
Then cry we, "Ah, the perfect paragon!"
Then crave we "Just one keepsake-leaf for us!"

Truth lies between: there 's anyhow a child
Of seventeen years, whether a flower or weed,
Ruined: who did it shall account to Christ —
Having no pity on the harmless life
And gentle face and girlish form he found,
And thus flings back. Go practise if you please
With men and women: leave a child alone
For Christ's particular love's sake! — so I say.

Somebody, at the bedside, said much more,
Took on him to explain the secret cause
O' the crime: quoth he, "Such crimes are very rife,
Explode nor make us wonder nowadays,
Seeing that Antichrist disseminates
That doctrine of the Philosophic Sin:
Molinos' sect will soon make earth too hot!"
"Nay," groaned the Augustinian, "what 's there new?
Crime will not fail to flare up from men's hearts
While hearts are men's and so born criminal;
Which one fact, always old yet ever new,
Accounts for so much crime that, for my part,
Molinos may go whistle to the wind
That waits outside a certain church, you know!"

Though really it does seem as if she here,
Pompilia, living so and dying thus,
Has had undue experience how much crime
A heart can hatch. Why was she made to learn
— Not you, not I, not even Molinos' self —
What Guido Franceschini's heart could hold?
Thus saintship is effected probably;
No sparing saints the process! — which the more
Tends to the reconciling us, no saints,
To sinnership, immunity and all.

For see now: Pietro and Violante's life
Till seventeen years ago, all Rome might note
And quote for happy — see the signs distinct
Of happiness as we yon Triton's trump.
What could they be but happy? — balanced so,
Nor low i' the social scale nor yet too high,
Nor poor nor richer than comports with ease,
Nor bright and envied, nor obscure and scorned,
Nor so young that their pleasures fell too thick,
Nor old past catching pleasure when it fell,
Nothing above, below the just degree,

All at the mean where joy's components mix.
So again, in the couple's very souls
You saw the adequate half with half to match,
Each having and each lacking somewhat, both
Making a whole that had all and lacked nought.
The round and sound, in whose composure just
The acquiescent and recipient side
Was Pietro's, and the stirring striving one
Violante's: both in union gave the due
Quietude, enterprise, craving and content,
Which go to bodily health and peace of mind.
But, as 't is said a body, rightly mixed,
Each element in equipoise, would last
Too long and live forever, — accordingly
Holds a germ — sand-grain weight too much i' the scale —
Ordained to get predominance one day
And so bring all to ruin and release, —
Not otherwise a fatal germ lurked here:
"With mortals much must go, but something stays;
Nothing will stay of our so happy selves."
Out of the very ripeness of life's core
A worm was bred — "Our life shall leave no fruit."
Enough of bliss, they thought, could bliss bear seed,
Yield its like, propagate a bliss in turn
And keep the kind up; not supplant themselves
But put in evidence, record they were,
Show them, when done with, i' the shape of a child.
"'T is in a child, man and wife grow complete,
One flesh: God says so: let him do his work!"

Now, one reminder of this gnawing want,
One special prick o' the maggot at the core,
Always befell when, as the day came round,
A certain yearly sum, — our Pietro being,
As the long name runs, an usufructuary, —
Dropped in the common bag as interest
Of money, his till death, not afterward,
Failing an heir: an heir would take and take,
A child of theirs be wealthy in their place
To nobody's hurt — the stranger else seized all.
Prosperity rolled river-like and stopped,
Making their mill go; but when wheel wore out,
The wave would find a space and sweep on free
And, half-a-mile off, grind some neighbor's corn.

Adam-like, Pietro sighed and said no more:
Eve saw the apple was fair and good to taste,

So, plucked it, having asked the snake advice.
She told her husband God was merciful,
And his and her prayer granted at the last:
Let the old mill-stone moulder, — wheel unworn,
Quartz from the quarry, shot into the stream
Adroitly, as before should go bring grist —
Their house continued to them by an heir,
Their vacant heart replenished with a child.
We have her own confession at full length
Made in the first remorse: 't was Jubilee
Pealed in the ear o' the conscience and it woke.
She found she had offended God no doubt,
So much was plain from what had happened since,
Misfortune on misfortune; but she harmed
No one i' the world, so far as she could see.
The act had gladdened Pietro to the height,
Her spouse whom God himself must gladden so
Or not at all: thus much seems probable
From the implicit faith, or rather say
Stupid credulity of the foolish man
Who swallowed such a tale nor strained a whit
Even at his wife's far-over-fifty years
Matching his sixty-and-under. Him she blessed;
And as for doing any detriment
To the veritable heir, — why, tell her first
Who was he? Which of all the hands held up
I' the crowd, one day would gather round their gate
Did she so wrong by intercepting thus
The ducat, spendthrift fortune thought to fling
For a scramble just to make the mob break shins?
She kept it, saved them kicks and cuffs thereby.
While at the least one good work had she wrought,
Good, clearly and incontestably! Her cheat —
What was it to its subject, the child's self,
But charity and religion? See the girl!
A body most like — a soul too probably —
Doomed to death, such a double death as waits
The illicit offspring of a common trull,
Sure to resent and forthwith rid herself
Of a mere interruption to sin's trade,
In the efficacious way old Tiber knows.
Was not so much proved by the ready sale
O' the child, glad transfer of this irksome chance?
Well then, she had caught up this castaway:
This fragile egg, some careless wild bird dropped,
She had picked from where it waited the footfall,

And put in her own breast till forth broke finch
Able to sing God praise on mornings now.
What so excessive harm was done? — she asked.

To which demand the dreadful answer comes —
For that same deed, now at Lorenzo's church,
Both agents, conscious and inconscious, lie;
While she, the deed was done to benefit,
Lies also, the most lamentable of things,
Yonder where curious people count her breaths,
Calculate how long yet the little life
Unspilt may serve their turn nor spoil the show,
Give them their story, then the church its group.

Well, having gained Pompilia, the girl grew
I' the midst of Pietro here, Violante there,
Each, like a semicircle with stretched arms,
Joining the other round her preciousness —
Two walls that go about a garden-plot
Where a chance sliver, branchlet slipt from bole
Of some tongue-leaved eye-figured Eden tree,
Filched by two exiles and borne far away,
Patiently glorifies their solitude, —
Year by year mounting, grade by grade surmount
The builded brick-work, yet is compassed still,
Still hidden happily and shielded safe, —
Else why should miracle have graced the ground?
But on the twelfth sun that brought April there
What meant that laugh? The coping-stone was reached;
Nay, above towered a light tuft of bloom
To be toyed with by butterfly or bee,
Done good to or else harm to from outside:
Pompilia's root, stalk and a branch or two
Home enclosed still, the rest would be the world's.
All which was taught our couple though obtuse,
Since walls have ears, when one day brought a priest,
Smooth-mannered soft-speeched sleek-cheeked visitor,
The notable Abate Paolo — known
As younger brother of a Tuscan house
Whereof the actual representative,
Count Guido, had employed his youth and age
In culture of Rome's most productive plant —
A cardinal: but years pass and change comes,
In token of which, here was our Paolo brought
To broach a weighty business. Might he speak?
Yes — to Violante somehow caught alone

While Pietro took his after-dinner doze,
And the young maiden, busily as befits,
Minded her broider-frame three chambers off.

So — giving now his great flap-hat a gloss
With flat o' the hand between-whiles, soothing now
The silk from out its creases o'er the calf,
Setting the stocking clerical again,
But never disengaging, once engaged,
The thin clear gray hold of his eyes on her —
He dissertated on that Tuscan house,
Those Franceschini, — very old they were —
Not rich however — oh, not rich, at least,
As people look to be who, low i' the scale
One way, have reason, rising all they can
By favor of the money-bag! 't is fair —
Do all gifts go together? But don't suppose
That being not so rich means all so poor!
Say rather, well enough — i' the way, indeed,
Ha, ha, to fortune better than the best:
Since if his brother's patron-friend kept faith,
Put into promised play the Cardinalate,
Their house might wear the red cloth that keeps warm,
Would but the Count have patience — there 's the point!
For he was slipping into years apace,
And years make men restless — they needs must spy
Some certainty, some sort of end assured,
Some sparkle, though from topmost beacon-tip,
That warrants life a harbor through the haze,
In short, call him fantastic as you choose,
Guido was home-sick, yearned for the old sights
And usual faces, — fain would settle himself
And have the patron's bounty when it fell
Irrigate far rather than deluge near,
Go fertilize Arezzo, not flood Rome.
Sooth to say, 't was the wiser wish: the Count
Proved wanting in ambition, — let us avouch,
Since truth is best, — in callousness of heart,
And winced at pin-pricks whereby honors hang
A ribbon o'er each puncture: his — no soul
Ecclesiastic (here the hat was brushed),
Humble but self-sustaining, calm and cold,
Having, as one who puts his hand to the plough,
Renounced the over-vivid family-feel —
Poor brother Guido! All too plain, he pined
Amid Rome's pomp and glare for dinginess

And that dilapidated palace-shell
Vast as a quarry and, very like, as bare —
Since to this comes old grandeur nowadays —
Or that absurd wild villa in the waste
O' the hillside, breezy though, for who likes air,
Vittiano, nor unpleasant with its vines,
Outside the city and the summer heats.
And now his harping on this one tense chord
The villa and the palace, palace this
And villa the other, all day and all night
Creaked like the implacable cicala's cry
And made one's ear-drum ache: nought else would serve
But that, to light his mother's visage up
With second youth, hope, gayety again,
He must find straightway, woo and haply win
And bear away triumphant back, some wife.
Well now, the man was rational in his way:
He, the Abate, — ought he to interpose?
Unless by straining still his tutelage
(Priesthood leaps over elder-brothership)
Across this difficulty: then let go,
Leave the poor fellow in peace! Would that be wrong?
There was no making Guido great, it seems,
Spite of himself: then happy be his dole!
Indeed, the Abate's little interest
Was somewhat nearly touched i' the case, they saw:
Since if his simple kinsman so were bent,
Began his rounds in Rome to catch a wife,
Full soon would such unworldliness surprise
The rare bird, sprinkle salt on phœnix' tail,
And so secure the nest a sparrow-hawk.
No lack of mothers here in Rome, — no dread
Of daughters lured as larks by looking-glass!
The first name-pecking credit-scratching fowl
Would drop her unfledged cuckoo in our nest
To gather grayness there, give voice at length
And shame the brood . . . but it was long ago
When crusades were, and we sent eagles forth!
No, that at least the Abate could forestall.
He read the thought within his brother's word,
Knew what he purposed better than himself.
We want no name and fame — having our own:
No worldly aggrandizement — such we fly:
But if some wonder of a woman's-heart
Were yet untainted on this grimy earth,
Tender and true — tradition tells of such —

Prepared to pant in time and tune with ours —
If some good girl (a girl, since she must take
The new bent, live new life, adopt new modes)
Not wealthy (Guido for his rank was poor)
But with whatever dowry came to hand, —
There were the lady-love predestinate!
And somehow the Abate's guardian eye —
Scintillant, rutilant, fraternal fire, —
Roving round every way had seized the prize
— The instinct of us, we, the spiritualty!
Come, cards on table; was it true or false
That here — here in this very tenement —
Yea, Via Vittoria did a marvel hide,
Lily of a maiden, white with intact leaf
Guessed through the sheath that saved it from the sun?
A daughter with the mother's hands still clasped
Over her head for fillet virginal,
A wife worth Guido's house and hand and heart?
He came to see; had spoken, he could no less —
(A final cherish of the stockinged calf)
If harm were, — well, the matter was off his mind.

Then with the great air did he kiss, devout,
Violante's hand, and rise up his whole height
(A certain purple gleam about the black)
And go forth grandly, — as if the Pope came next.
And so Violante rubbed her eyes awhile,
Got up too, walked to wake her Pietro soon
And pour into his ear the mighty news
How somebody had somehow somewhere seen
Their tree-top-tuft of bloom above the wall,
And came now to apprise them the tree's self
Was no such crab-sort as should go feed swine,
But veritable gold, the Hesperian ball
Ordained for Hercules to haste and pluck,
And bear and give the Gods to banquet with —
Hercules standing ready at the door.
Whereon did Pietro rub his eyes in turn,
Look very wise, a little woful too,
Then, periwig on head, and cane in hand,
Sally forth dignifiedly into the Square
Of Spain across Babbuino the six steps,
Toward the Boat-fountain where our idlers lounge, —
Ask, for form's sake, who Hercules might be,
And have congratulation from the world.

Heartily laughed the world in his fool's-face
And told him Hercules was just the heir
To the stubble once a cornfield, and brick-heap
Where used to be a dwelling-place now burned.
Guido and Franceschini; a Count, — ay:
But a cross i' the poke to bless the Countship? No!
All gone except sloth, pride, rapacity,
Humors of the imposthume incident
To rich blood that runs thin, — nursed to a head
By the rankly-salted soil — a cardinal's court
Where, parasite and picker-up of crumbs,
He had hung on long, and now, let go, said some,
Shaken off, said others, — but in any case
Tired of the trade and something worse for wear,
Was wanting to change town for country quick,
Go home again: let Pietro help him home!
The brother, Abate Paolo, shrewder mouse,
Had pricked for comfortable quarters, inched
Into the core of Rome, and fattened so;
But Guido, over-burly for rat's hole
Suited to clerical slimness, starved outside,
Must shift for himself: and so the shift was this!
What, was the snug retreat of Pietro tracked,
The little provision for his old age snuffed?
"Oh, make your girl a lady, an you list,
But have more mercy on our wit than vaunt
Your bargain as we burgesses who brag!
Why, Goodman Dullard, if a friend must speak,
Would the Count, think you, stoop to you and yours
Were there the value of one penny-piece
To rattle 'twixt his palms — or likelier laugh,
Bid your Pompilia help you black his shoe?"

Home again, shaking oft the puzzled pate,
Went Pietro to announce a change indeed,
Yet point Violante where some solace lay
Of a rueful sort, — the taper, quenched so soon,
Had ended merely in a snuff, not stink —
Congratulate there was one hope the less
Not misery the more: and so an end.

The marriage thus impossible, the rest
Followed: our spokesman, Paolo, heard his fate,
Resignedly Count Guido bore the blow:
Violante wiped away the transient tear,
Renounced the playing Danae to gold dreams,

Praised much her Pietro's prompt sagaciousness,
Found neighbors' envy natural, lightly laughed
At gossips' malice, fairly wrapped herself
In her integrity three folds about,
And, letting pass a little day or two,
Threw, even over that integrity,
Another wrappage, namely one thick veil
That hid her, matron-wise, from head to foot,
And, by the hand holding a girl veiled too,
Stood, one dim end of a December day,
In Saint Lorenzo on the altar-step —
Just where she lies now and that girl will lie —
Only with fifty candles' company
Now, in the place of the poor winking one
Which saw — doors shut and sacristan made sure —
A priest — perhaps Abate Paolo — wed
Guido clandestinely, irrevocably
To his Pompilia aged thirteen years
And five months, — witness the church register, —
Pompilia, (thus become Count Guido's wife
Clandestinely, irrevocably his,)
Who all the while had borne, from first to last,
As brisk a part i' the bargain, as yon lamb,
Brought forth from basket and set out for sale,
Bears while they chaffer, wary market-man
And voluble housewife, o'er it, — each in turn
Patting the curly calm inconscious head,
With the shambles ready round the corner there,
When the talk 's talked out and a bargain struck.

Transfer complete, why, Pietro was apprised.
Violante sobbed the sobs and prayed the prayers,
And said the serpent tempted so she fell,
Till Pietro had to clear his brow apace
And make the best of matters: wrath at first, —
How else? pacification presently,
Why not? — could flesh withstand the impurpled one,
The very Cardinal, Paolo's patron-friend?
Who, justifiably surnamed "a hinge,"
Knew where the mollifying oil should drop
To cure the creak o' the valve, — considerate
For frailty, patient in a naughty world.
He even volunteered to supervise
The rough draught of those marriage-articles
Signed in a hurry by Pietro, since revoked:
Trust 's politic, suspicion does the harm,

There is but one way to browbeat this world,
Dumb-founder doubt, and repay scorn in kind,—
To go on trusting, namely, till faith move
Mountains.

And faith here made the mountains move.
Why, friends whose zeal cried "Caution ere too late!"—
Bade "Pause ere jump, with both feet joined, on slough!"—
Counselled "If rashness then, now temperance!"—
Heard for their pains that Pietro had closed eyes,
Jumped and was in the middle of the mire,
Money and all, just what should sink a man.
By the mere marriage, Guido gained forthwith
Dowry, his wife's right; no rescinding there:
But Pietro, why must he needs ratify
One gift Violante gave, pay down one doit
Promised in first fool's-flurry? Grasp the bag
Lest the son's service flag,—is reason and rhyme,
Above all when the son's a son-in-law.
Words to the wind! The parents cast their lot
Into the lap o' the daughter: and the son
Now with a right to lie there, took what fell,
Pietro's whole having and holding, house and field,
Goods, chattels and effects, his worldly worth
Present and in perspective, all renounced
In favor of Guido. As for the usufruct—
The interest now, the principal anon,
Would Guido please to wait, at Pietro's death:
Till when, he must support the couple's charge,
Bear with them, housemates, pensionaries, pawned
To an alien for fulfilment of their pact.
Guido should at discretion deal them orts,
Bread-bounty in Arezzo the strange place,—
They who had lived deliciously and rolled
Rome's choicest comfit 'neath the tongue before.
Into this quag, "jump" bade the Cardinal!
And neck-deep in a minute there flounced they.

But they touched bottom at Arezzo: there—
Four months' experience of how craft and greed,
Quickened by penury and pretentious hate
Of plain truth, brutify and bestialize,—
Four months' taste of apportioned insolence,
Cruelty graduated, dose by dose
Of ruffianism dealt out at bed and board,
And lo, the work was done, success clapped hands.

The starved, stripped, beaten brace of stupid dupes
Broke at last in their desperation loose,
Fled away for their lives, and lucky so;
Found their account in casting coat afar
And bearing off a shred of skin at least:
Left Guido lord o' the prey, as the lion is,
And, careless what came after, carried their wrongs
To Rome, — I nothing doubt, with such remorse
As folly feels, since pain can make it wise,
But crime, past wisdom, which is innocence,
Needs not be plagued with till a later day.

Pietro went back to beg from door to door,
In hope that memory not quite extinct
Of cheery days and festive nights would move
Friends and acquaintance — after the natural laugh,
And tributary "Just as we foretold —"
To show some bowels, give the dregs o' the cup,
Scraps of the trencher, to their host that was,
Or let him share the mat with the mastiff, he
Who lived large and kept open house so long.
Not so Violante: ever ahead i' the march,
Quick at the by-road and the cut-across,
She went first to the best adviser, God —
Whose finger unmistakably was felt
In all this retribution of the past.
Here was the prize of sin, luck of a lie!
But here too was what Holy Year would help,
Bound to rid sinners of sin vulgar, sin
Abnormal, sin prodigious, up to sin
Impossible and supposed for Jubilee' sake:
To lift the leadenest of lies, let soar
The soul unhampered by a feather-weight.
"I will" said she "go burn out this bad hole
That breeds the scorpion, balk the plague at least
Of hope to further plague by progeny:
I will confess my fault, be punished, yes,
But pardoned too: Saint Peter pays for all."

So, with the crowd she mixed, made for the dome,
Through the great door new-broken for the nonce
Marched, muffled more than ever matron-wise,
Up the left nave to the formidable throne,
Fell into file with this the poisoner
And that the parricide, and reached in turn
The poor repugnant Penitentiary

Set at this gully-hole o' the world's discharge
To help the frightfullest of filth have vent,
And then knelt down and whispered in his ear
How she had bought Pompilia, palmed the babe
On Pietro, passed the girl off as their child
To Guido, and defrauded of his due
This one and that one, — more than she could name,
Until her solid piece of wickedness
Happened to split and spread woe far and wide:
Contritely now she brought the case for cure.

Replied the throne — "Ere God forgive the guilt,
Make man some restitution! Do your part!
The owners of your husband's heritage,
Barred thence by this pretended birth and heir, —
Tell them, the bar came so, is broken so,
Theirs be the due reversion as before!
Your husband who, no partner in the guilt,
Suffers the penalty, led blindfold thus
By love of what he thought his flesh and blood
To alienate his all in her behalf, —
Tell him too such contract is null and void!
Last, he who personates your son-in-law,
Who with sealed eyes and stopped ears, tame and mute,
Took at your hand that bastard of a whore
You called your daughter and he calls his wife, —
Tell him, and bear the anger which is just!
Then, penance so performed, may pardon be!"

Who could gainsay this just and right award?
Nobody in the world: but, out o' the world,
Who knows? — might timid intervention be
From any makeshift of an angel-guide,
Substitute for celestial guardianship,
Pretending to take care of the girl's self:
"Woman, confessing crime is healthy work,
And telling truth relieves a liar like you,
But how of my quite unconsidered charge?
No thought if, while this good befalls yourself,
Aught in the way of harm may find out her?"
No least thought, I assure you: truth being truth,
Tell it and shame the devil!

Said and done:
Home went Violante, and disbosomed all:
And Pietro who, six months before, had borne

Word after word of such a piece of news
Like so much cold steel inched through his breast-blade,
Now at its entry gave a leap for joy,
As who — what did I say of one in a quag? —
Should catch a hand from heaven and spring thereby
Out of the mud, on ten toes stand once more.
"What? All that used to be, may be again?
My money mine again, my house, my land,
My chairs and tables, all mine evermore?
What, the girl's dowry never was the girl's,
And, unpaid yet, is never now to pay?
Then the girl's self, my pale Pompilia child
That used to be my own with her great eyes —
He who drove us forth, why should he keep her
When proved as very a pauper as himself?
Will she come back, with nothing changed at all,
And laugh, 'But how you dreamed uneasily!
I saw the great drops stand here on your brow —
Did I do wrong to wake you with a kiss?'
No, indeed, darling! No, for wide awake
I see another outburst of surprise:
The lout-lord, bully-beggar, braggart-sneak,
Who, not content with cutting purse, crops ear —
Assuredly it shall be salve to mine
When this great news red-letters him, the rogue!
Ay, let him taste the teeth o' the trap, this fox,
Give us our lamb back, golden fleece and all,
Let her creep in and warm our breasts again!
Why care for the past? — we three are our old selves,
And know now what the outside world is worth."
And so, he carried case before the courts;
And there Violante, blushing to the bone,
Made public declaration of her fault,
Renounced her motherhood, and prayed the law
To interpose, frustrate of its effect
Her folly, and redress the injury done.

Whereof was the disastrous consequence,
That though indisputably clear the case
(For thirteen years are not so large a lapse,
And still six witnesses survived in Rome
To prove the truth o' the tale) — yet, patent wrong
Seemed Guido's; the first cheat had chanced on him:
Here was the pity that, deciding right,
Those who began the wrong would gain the prize.
Guido pronounced the story one long lie

Lied to do robbery and take revenge:
Or say it were no lie at all but truth,
Then, it both robbed the right heirs and shamed him
Without revenge to humanize the deed:
What had he done when first they shamed him thus?
But that were too fantastic: losels they,
And leasing this world's-wonder of a lie,
They lied to blot him though it brand themselves.

So answered Guido through the Abate's mouth.
Wherefore the court, its customary way,
Inclined to the middle course the sage affect.
They held the child to be a changeling, — good:
But, lest the husband got no good thereby,
They willed the dowry, though not hers at all,
Should yet be his, if not by right then grace —
Part-payment for the plain injustice done.
As for that other contract, Pietro's work,
Renunciation of his own estate,
That must be cancelled — give him back his gifts,
He was no party to the cheat at least!
So ran the judgment: — whence a prompt appeal
On both sides, seeing right is absolute.
Cried Pietro, "Is the child no child of mine?
Why give her a child's dowry?" — "Have I right
To the dowry, why not to the rest as well?"
Cried Guido, or cried Paolo in his name:
Till law said, "Reinvestigate the case!"
And so the matter pends, to this same day.

Hence new disaster — here no outlet seemed:
Whatever the fortune of the battlefield,
No path whereby the fatal man might march
Victorious, wreath on head and spoils in hand,
And back turned full upon the baffled foe, —
Nor cranny whence, desperate and disgraced,
Stripped to the skin, he might be fain to crawl
Worm-like, and so away with his defeat —
To other fortune and a novel prey.
No, he was pinned to the place there, left alone
With his immense hate and, the solitary
Subject to satisfy that hate, his wife.
"Cast her off? Turn her naked out of doors?
Easily said! But still the action pends,
Still dowry, principal and interest,
Pietro's possessions, all I bargained for, —

Any good day, be but my friends alert,
May give them me if she continue mine.
Yet, keep her? Keep the puppet of my foes —
Her voice that lisps me back their curse — her eye
They lend their leer of triumph to — her lip
I touch and taste their very filth upon?"

In short, he also took the middle course
Rome taught him — did at last excogitate
How he might keep the good and leave the bad
Twined in revenge, yet extricable, — nay
Make the very hate's eruption, very rush
Of the unpent sluice of cruelty relieve
His heart first, then go fertilize his field.
What if the girl-wife, tortured with due care,
Should take, as though spontaneously, the road
It were impolitic to thrust her on?
If, goaded, she broke out in full revolt,
Followed her parents i' the face o' the world,
Branded as runaway not castaway,
Self-sentenced and self-punished in the act?
So should the loathed form and detested face
Launch themselves into hell and there be lost
While he looked o'er the brink with folded arms;
So should the heaped-up shames go shuddering back
O' the head o' the heapers, Pietro and his wife,
And bury in the breakage three at once:
While Guido, left free, no one right renounced,
Gain present, gain prospective, all the gain,
None of the wife except her rights absorbed,
Should ask law what it was law paused about —
If law were dubious still whose word to take,
The husband's — dignified and derelict,
Or the wife's — the . . . what I tell you. It should be.

Guido's first step was to take pen, indite
A letter to the Abate, — not his own,
His wife's, — she should re-write, sign, seal and send.
She liberally told the household-news,
Rejoiced her vile progenitors were gone,
Revealed their malice — how they even laid
A last injunction on her, when they fled,
That she should forthwith find a paramour,
Complot with him to gather spoil enough,
Then burn the house down, — taking previous care
To poison all its inmates overnight, —

And so companioned, so provisioned too,
Follow to Rome and there join fortunes gay.
This letter, traced in pencil-characters,
Guido as easily got retraced in ink
By his wife's pen, guided from end to end,
As if it had been just so much Chinese.
For why? That wife could broider, sing perhaps,
Pray certainly, but no more read than write
This letter, "which yet write she must," he said,
"Being half courtesy and compliment,
Half sisterliness: take the thing on trust!"
She had as readily retraced the words
Of her own death-warrant, — in some sort 't was so.
This letter the Abate in due course
Communicated to such curious souls
In Rome as needs must pry into the cause
Of quarrel, why the Comparini fled
The Franceschini, whence the grievance grew,
What the hubbub meant: "Nay, — see the wife's own word
Authentic answer! Tell detractors too
There 's a plan formed, a programme figured here
— Pray God no after-practice put to proof,
This letter cast no light upon, one day!"

So much for what should work in Rome: back now
To Arezzo, follow up the project there,
Forward the next step with as bold a foot,
And plague Pompilia to the height, you see!
Accordingly did Guido set himself
To worry up and down, across, around,
The woman, hemmed in by her household-bars, —
Chase her about the coop of daily life,
Having first stopped each outlet thence save one,
Which, like bird with a ferret in her haunt,
She needs must seize as sole way of escape
Though there was tied and twittering a decoy
To seem as if it tempted, — just the plume
O' the popinjay, not a real respite there
From tooth and claw of something in the dark, —
Giuseppe Caponsacchi.

Now begins
The tenebrific passage of the tale:
How hold a light, display the cavern's gorge?
How, in this phase of the affair, show truth?
Here is the dying wife who smiles and says

"So it was, — so it was not, — how it was,
I never knew nor ever care to know —"
Till they all weep, physician, man of law,
Even that poor old bit of battered brass
Beaten out of all shape by the world's sins,
Common utensil of the lazar-house —
Confessor Celestino groans "'T is truth,
All truth and only truth: there 's something here,
Some presence in the room beside us all,
Something that every lie expires before:
No question she was pure from first to last."
So far is well and helps us to believe:
But beyond, she the helpless, simple-sweet
Or silly-sooth, unskilled to break one blow
At her good fame by putting finger forth, —
How can she render service to the truth?
The bird says "So I fluttered where a springe
Caught me: the springe did not contrive itself,
That I know: who contrived it, God forgive!"
But we, who hear no voice and have dry eyes,
Must ask, — we cannot else, absolving her, —
How of the part played by that same decoy
I' the catching, caging? Was himself caught first?
We deal here with no innocent at least,
No witless victim, — he 's a man of the age
And priest beside, — persuade the mocking world
Mere charity boiled over in this sort!
He whose own safety too, — (the Pope 's apprised —
Good-natured with the secular offence,
The Pope looks grave on priesthood in a scrape) —
Our priest's own safety therefore, maybe life,
Hangs on the issue! You will find it hard.
Guido is here to meet you with fixed foot,
Stiff like a statue — "Leave what went before!
My wife fled i' the company of a priest,
Spent two days and two nights alone with him:
Leave what came after!" He stands hard to throw.
Moreover priests are merely flesh and blood;
When we get weakness, and no guilt beside,
'T is no such great ill-fortune: finding gray,
We gladly call that white which might be black,
Too used to the double-dye. So, if the priest,
Moved by Pompilia's youth and beauty, gave
Way to the natural weakness . . . Anyhow,
Here be facts, charactery; what they spell
Determine, and thence pick what sense you may!

There was a certain young bold handsome priest
Popular in the city, far and wide
Famed, since Arezzo's but a little place,
As the best of good companions, gay and grave
At the decent minute; settled in his stall,
Or sidling, lute on lap, by lady's couch,
Ever the courtly Canon: see in him
A proper star to climb and culminate,
Have its due handbreadth of the heaven at Rome,
Though meanwhile pausing on Arezzo's edge,
As modest candle does 'mid mountain fog,
To rub off redness and rusticity
Ere it sweep chastened, gain the silver-sphere!
Whether through Guido's absence or what else,
This Caponsacchi, favorite of the town,
Was yet no friend of his nor free o' the house,
Though both moved in the regular magnates' march:
Each must observe the other's tread and halt
At church, saloon, theatre, house of play.
Who could help noticing the husband's slouch,
The black of his brow — or miss the news that buzzed
Of how the little solitary wife
Wept and looked out of window all day long?
What need of minute search into such springs
As start men, set o' the move? — machinery
Old as earth, obvious as the noonday sun.
Why, take men as they come, — an instance now, —
Of all those who have simply gone to see
Pompilia on her deathbed since four days,
Half at the least are, call it how you please,
In love with her — I don't except the priests
Nor even the old confessor whose eyes run
Over at what he styles his sister's voice
Who died so early and weaned him from the world.
Well, had they viewed her ere the paleness pushed
The last o' the red o' the rose away, while yet
Some hand, adventurous 'twixt the wind and her,
Might let shy life run back and raise the flower
Rich with reward up to the guardian's face, —
Would they have kept that hand employed all day
At fumbling on with prayer-book pages? No!
Men are men: why then need I say one word
More than that our mere man the Canon here
Saw, pitied, loved Pompilia?

This is why;
This startling why: that Caponsacchi's self —

Whom foes and friends alike avouch, for good
Or ill, a man of truth whate'er betide,
Intrepid altogether, reckless too
How his own fame and fortune, tossed to the winds,
Suffer by any turn the adventure take,
Nay, more — not thrusting, like a badge to hide,
'Twixt shirt and skin a joy which shown is shame —
But flirting flag-like i' the face o' the world
This tell-tale kerchief, this conspicuous love
For the lady, — oh, called innocent love, I know!
Only, such scarlet fiery innocence
As most folk would try muffle up in shade, —
— 'T is strange then that this else abashless mouth
Should yet maintain, for truth's sake which is God's,
That it was not he made the first advance,
That, even ere word had passed between the two,
Pompilia penned him letters, passionate prayers,
If not love, then so simulating love
That he, no novice to the taste of thyme,
Turned from such over-luscious honey-clot
At end o' the flower, and would not lend his lip
Till . . . but the tale here frankly outsoars faith:
There must be falsehood somewhere. For her part,
Pompilia quietly constantly avers
She never penned a letter in her life
Nor to the Canon nor any other man,
Being incompetent to write and read:
Nor had she ever uttered word to him, nor he
To her till that same evening when they met,
She on her window-terrace, he beneath
I' the public street, as was their fateful chance,
And she adjured him in the name of God
To find out, bring to pass where, when and how
Escape with him to Rome might be contrived.
Means were found, plan laid, time fixed, she avers,
And heart assured to heart in loyalty,
All at an impulse! All extemporized
As in romance-books! Is that credible?
Well, yes: as she avers this with calm mouth
Dying, I do think "Credible!" you 'd cry —
Did not the priest's voice come to break the spell.
They questioned him apart, as the custom is,
When first the matter made a noise at Rome,
And he, calm, constant then as she is now,
For truth's sake did assert and reassert
Those letters called him to her and he came,

— Which damns the story credible otherwise.
Why should this man, — mad to devote himself,
Careless what comes of his own fame, the first, —
Be studious thus to publish and declare
Just what the lightest nature loves to hide,
So screening lady from the byword's laugh
"First spoke the lady, last the cavalier!"
— I say, — why should the man tell truth just now
When graceful lying meets such ready shrift?
Or is there a first moment for a priest
As for a woman, when invaded shame
Must have its first and last excuse to show?
Do both contrive love's entry in the mind
Shall look, i' the manner of it, a surprise,
That after, once the flag o' the fort hauled down,
Effrontery may sink drawbridge, open gate,
Welcome and entertain the conqueror?
Or what do you say to a touch of the devil's worst?
Can it be that the husband, he who wrote
The letter to his brother I told you of,
I' the name of her it meant to criminate, —
What if he wrote those letters to the priest?
Further the priest says, when it first befell,
This folly o' the letters, that he checked the flow,
Put them back lightly each with its reply.
Here again vexes new discrepancy:
There never reached her eye a word from him;
He did write but she could not read — could just
Burn the offence to wifehood, womanhood,
So did burn: never bade him come to her,
Yet when it proved he must come, let him come,
And when he did come though uncalled, — why, spoke
Prompt by an inspiration: thus it chanced,
Will you go somewhat back to understand?

When first, pursuant to his plan, there sprang,
Like an uncaged beast, Guido's cruelty
On soul and body of his wife, she cried
To those whom law appoints resource for such,
The secular guardian, — that 's the Governor,
And the Archbishop, — that 's the spiritual guide,
And prayed them take the claws from out her flesh.
Now, this is ever the ill consequence
Of being noble, poor and difficult,
Ungainly, yet too great to disregard, —
This — that born peers and friends hereditary, —

Though disinclined to help from their own store
The opprobrious wight, put penny in his poke
From private purse or leave the door ajar
When he goes wistful by at dinner-time, —
Yet, if his needs conduct him where they sit
Smugly in office, judge this, bishop that,
Dispensers of the shine and shade o' the place —
And if, friend's door shut and friend's purse undrawn,
Still potentates may find the office-seat
Do as good service at no cost — give help
By-the-bye, pay up traditional dues at once
Just through a feather-weight too much i' the scale,
Or finger-tip forgot at the balance-tongue,
Why, only churls refuse, or Molinists.
Thus when, in the first roughness of surprise
At Guido's wolf-face whence the sheepskin fell,
The frightened couple, all bewilderment,
Rushed to the Governor, — who else rights wrong?
Told him their tale of wrong and craved redress —
Why, then the Governor woke up to the fact
That Guido was a friend of old, poor Count! —
So, promptly paid his tribute, promised the pair,
Wholesome chastisement should soon cure their qualms
Next time they came, wept, prated and told lies:
So stopped all prating, sent them dumb to Rome.

Well, now it was Pompilia's turn to try:
The troubles pressing on her, as I said,
Three times she rushed, maddened by misery,
To the other mighty man, sobbed out her prayer
At footstool of the Archbishop — fast the friend
Of her husband also! Oh, good friends of yore!
So, the Archbishop, not to be outdone
By the Governor, break custom more than he,
Thrice bade the foolish woman stop her tongue,
Unloosed her hands from harassing his gout,
Coached her and carried her to the Count again,
— His old friend should be master in his house,
Rule his wife and correct her faults at need!
Well, driven from post to pillar in this wise,
She, as a last resource, betook herself
To one, should be no family-friend at least,
A simple friar o' the city; confessed to him,
Then told how fierce temptation of release
By self-dealt death was busy with her soul,
And urged that he put this in words, write plain
For one who could not write, set down her prayer

That Pietro and Violante, parent-like
If somehow not her parents, should for love
Come save her, pluck from out the flame the brand
Themselves had thoughtlessly thrust in so deep
To send gay-colored sparkles up and cheer
Their seat at the chimney-corner. The good friar
Promised as much at the moment; but, alack,
Night brings discretion: he was no one's friend,
Yet presently found he could not turn about
Nor take a step i' the case and fail to tread
On some one's toe who either was a friend,
Or a friend's friend, or friend's friend thrice-removed,
And woe to friar by whom offences come!
So, the course being plain, — with a general sigh
At matrimony the profound mistake, —
He threw reluctantly the business up,
Having his other penitents to mind.

If then, all outlets thus secured save one,
At last she took to the open, stood and stared
With her wan face to see where God might wait —
And there found Caponsacchi wait as well
For the precious something at perdition's edge,
He only was predestinate to save, —
And if they recognized in a critical flash
From the zenith, each the other, her need of him,
His need of . . . say, a woman to perish for,
The regular way o' the world, yet break no vow,
Do no harm save to himself, — if this were thus?
How do you say? It were improbable;
So is the legend of my patron-saint.

Anyhow, whether, as Guido states the case,
Pompilia, — like a starving wretch i' the street
Who stops and rifles the first passenger
In the great right of an excessive wrong, —
Did somehow call this stranger and he came, —
Or whether the strange sudden interview
Blazed as when star and star must needs go close
Till each hurts each and there is loss in heaven —
Whatever way in this strange world it was, —
Pompilia and Caponsacchi met, in fine,
She at her window, he i' the street beneath,
And understood each other at first look.

All was determined and performed at once.
And on a certain April evening, late

I' the month, this girl of sixteen, bride and wife
Three years and over, — she who hitherto
Had never taken twenty steps in Rome
Beyond the church, pinned to her mother's gown,
Nor, in Arezzo, knew her way through street
Except what led to the Archbishop's door, —
Such an one rose up in the dark, laid hand
On what came first, clothes and a trinket or two,
Belongings of her own in the old day, —
Stole from the side o' the sleeping spouse — who knows?
Sleeping perhaps, silent for certain, — slid
Ghost-like from great dark room to great dark room,
In through the tapestries and out again
And onward, unembarrassed as a fate,
Descended staircase, gained last door of all,
Sent it wide open at first push of palm,
And there stood, first time, last and only time,
At liberty, alone in the open street, —
Unquestioned, unmolested found herself
At the city gate, by Caponsacchi's side,
Hope there, joy there, life and all good again,
The carriage there, the convoy there, light there
Broadening ever into blaze at Rome
And breaking small what long miles lay between;
Up she sprang, in he followed, they were safe.

The husband quotes this for incredible,
All of the story from first word to last:
Sees the priest's hand throughout upholding hers,
Traces his foot to the alcove, that night,
Whither and whence blindfold he knew the way,
Proficient in all craft and stealthiness;
And cites for proof a servant, eye that watched
And ear that opened to purse secrets up,
A woman-spy, — suborned to give and take
Letters and tokens, do the work of shame
The more adroitly that herself, who helped
Communion thus between a tainted pair,
Had long since been a leper thick in spot,
A common trull o' the town: she witnessed all,
Helped many meetings, partings, took her wage
And then told Guido the whole matter. Lies!
The woman's life confutes her word, — her word
Confutes itself: "Thus, thus and thus I lied."
"And thus, no question, still you lie," we say.

"Ay, but at last, e'en have it how you will,
Whatever the means, whatever the way, explodes
The consummation" — the accusers shriek:
"Here is the wife avowedly found in flight,
And the companion of her flight, a priest;
She flies her husband, he the church his spouse:
What is this?"

Wife and priest alike reply,
"This is the simple thing it claims to be,
A course we took for life and honor's sake,
Very strange, very justifiable."
She says, "God put it in my head to fly,
As when the martin migrates: autumn claps
Her hands, cries 'Winter's coming, will be here,
Off with you ere the white teeth overtake!
Flee!' So I fled: this friend was the warm day,
The south wind and whatever favors flight;
I took the favor, had the help, how else?
And so we did fly rapidly all night,
All day, all night — a longer night — again,
And then another day, longest of days,
And all the while, whether we fled or stopped,
I scarce know how or why, one thought filled both,
'Fly and arrive!' So long as I found strength
I talked with my companion, told him much,
Knowing that he knew more, knew me, knew God
And God's disposal of me, — but the sense
O' the blessed flight absorbed me in the main,
And speech became mere talking through a sleep,
Till at the end of that last longest night
In a red daybreak, when we reached an inn
And my companion whispered 'Next stage — Rome!'
Sudden the weak flesh fell like piled-up cards,
All the frail fabric at a finger's touch,
And prostrate the poor soul too, and I said,
'But though Count Guido were a furlong off,
Just on me, I must stop and rest awhile!'
Then something like a huge white wave o' the sea
Broke o'er my brain and buried me in sleep
Blessedly, till it ebbed and left me loose,
And where was I found but on a strange bed
In a strange room like hell, roaring with noise,
Ruddy with flame, and filled with men, in front
Who but the man you call my husband? ay —
Count Guido once more between heaven and me,

For there my heaven stood, my salvation, yes —
That Caponsacchi all my heaven of help,
Helpless himself, held prisoner in the hands
Of men who looked up in my husband's face
To take the fate thence he should signify,
Just as the way was at Arezzo. Then,
Not for my sake but his who had helped me —
I sprang up, reached him with one bound, and seized
The sword o' the felon, trembling at his side,
Fit creature of a coward, unsheathed the thing
And would have pinned him through the poison-bag
To the wall and left him there to palpitate,
As you serve scorpions, but men interposed —
Disarmed me, gave his life to him again
That he might take mine and the other lives;
And he has done so. I submit myself!"

The priest says — oh, and in the main result
The facts asseverate, he truly says,
As to the very act and deed of him,
However you mistrust the mind o' the man —
The flight was just for flight's sake, no pretext
For aught except to set Pompilia free.
He says, "I cite the husband's self's worst charge
In proof of my best word for both of us.
Be it conceded that so many times
We took our pleasure in his palace: then,
What need to fly at all? — or flying no less,
What need to outrage the lips sick and white
Of a woman, and bring ruin down beside,
By halting when Rome lay one stage beyond?"
So does he vindicate Pompilia's fame,
Confirm her story in all points but one —
This; that, so fleeing and so breathing forth
Her last strength in the prayer to halt awhile,
She makes confusion of the reddening white
Which was the sunset when her strength gave way,
And the next sunrise and its whitening red
Which she revived in when her husband came:
She mixes both times, morn and eve, in one,
Having lived through a blank of night 'twixt each
Though dead-asleep, unaware as a corpse,
She on the bed above; her friend below
Watched in the doorway of the inn the while,
Stood i' the red o' the morn, that she mistakes,
In act to rouse and quicken the tardy crew
And hurry out the horses, have the stage

Over, the last league, reach Rome and be safe:
When up came Guido.
Guido's tale begins—
How he and his whole household, drunk to death
By some enchanted potion, poppied drugs
Plied by the wife, lay powerless in gross sleep
And left the spoilers unimpeded way,
Could not shake off their poison and pursue,
Till noontide, then made shift to get on horse
And did pursue: which means he took his time,
Pressed on no more than lingered after, step
By step, just making sure o' the fugitives,
Till at the nick of time, he saw his chance,
Seized it, came up with and surprised the pair.
How he must needs have gnawn lip and gnashed teeth,
Taking successively at tower and town,
Village and roadside, still the same report,
"Yes, such a pair arrived an hour ago,
Sat in the carriage just where now you stand,
While we got horses ready,—turned deaf ear
To all entreaty they would even alight;
Counted the minutes and resumed their course."
Would they indeed escape, arrive at Rome,
Leave no least loop-hole to let murder through,
But foil him of his captured infamy,
Prize of guilt proved and perfect? So it seemed:
Till, oh the happy chance, at last stage, Rome
But two short hours off, Castelnuovo reached,
The guardian angel gave reluctant place,
Satan stepped forward with alacrity,
Pompilia's flesh and blood succumbed, perforce
A halt was, and her husband had his will.
Perdue he couched, counted out hour by hour
Till he should spy in the east a signal-streak—
Night had been, morrow was, triumph would be.
Do you see the plan deliciously complete?
The rush upon the unsuspecting sleep,
The easy execution, the outcry
Over the deed, "Take notice all the world!
These two dead bodies, locked still in embrace,—
The man is Caponsacchi and a priest,
The woman is my wife: they fled me late,
Thus have I found and you behold them thus,
And may judge me: do you approve or no?"

Success did seem not so improbable,
But that already Satan's laugh was heard,

His black back turned on Guido — left i' the lurch,
Or rather, balked of suit and service now,
Left to improve on both by one deed more,
Burn up the better at no distant day,
Body and soul one holocaust to hell.
Anyhow, of this natural consequence
Did just the last link of the long chain snap:
For an eruption was o' the priest, alive
And alert, calm, resolute and formidable,
Not the least look of fear in that broad brow —
One not to be disposed of by surprise,
And armed moreover — who had guessed as much?
Yes, there stood he in secular costume
Complete from head to heel, with sword at side,
He seemed to know the trick of perfectly.
There was no prompt suppression of the man
As he said calmly, "I have saved your wife
From death; there was no other way but this;
Of what do I defraud you except death?
Charge any wrong beyond, I answer it."
Guido, the valorous, had met his match,
Was forced to demand help instead of fight,
Bid the authorities o' the place lend aid
And make the best of a broken matter so.
They soon obeyed the summons — I suppose,
Apprised and ready, or not far to seek —
Laid hands on Caponsacchi, found in fault,
A priest yet flagrantly accoutred thus, —
Then, to make good Count Guido's further charge,
Proceeded, prisoner made lead the way,
In a crowd, upstairs to the chamber-door,
Where wax-white, dead asleep, deep beyond dream,
As the priest laid her, lay Pompilia yet.

And as he mounted step and step with the crowd
How I see Guido taking heart again!
He knew his wife so well and the way of her —
How at the outbreak she would shroud her shame
In hell's heart, would it mercifully yawn —
How, failing that, her forehead to his foot,
She would crouch silent till the great doom fell,
Leave him triumphant with the crowd to see
Guilt motionless or writhing like a worm!
No! Second misadventure, this worm turned,
I told you: would have slain him on the spot
With his own weapon, but they seized her hands:

Leaving her tongue free, as it tolled the knell
Of Guido's hope so lively late. The past
Took quite another shape now. She who shrieked
"At least and forever I am mine and God's,
Thanks to his liberating angel Death —
Never again degraded to be yours
The ignoble noble, the unmanly man,
The beast below the beast in brutishness!" —
This was the froward child, "the restif lamb
Used to be cherished in his breast," he groaned —
"Eat from his hand and drink from out his cup,
The while his fingers pushed their loving way
Through curl on curl of that soft coat — alas,
And she all silverly baaed gratitude
While meditating mischief!" — and so forth.
He must invent another story now!
The ins and outs o' the rooms were searched: he found
Or showed for found the abominable prize —
Love-letters from his wife who cannot write,
Love-letters in reply o' the priest — thank God! —
Who can write and confront his character
With this, and prove the false thing forged throughout:
Spitting whereat, he needs must spatter whom
But Guido's self? — that forged and falsified
One letter called Pompilia's, past dispute:
Then why not these to make sure still more sure?

So was the case concluded then and there:
Guido preferred his charges in due form,
Called on the law to adjudicate, consigned
The accused ones to the Prefect of the place.
(Oh mouse-birth of that mountain-like revenge!)
And so to his own place betook himself
After the spring that failed, — the wildcat's way.
The captured parties were conveyed to Rome;
Investigation followed here i' the court —
Soon to review the fruit of its own work,
From then to now being eight months and no more.
Guido kept out of sight and safe at home:
The Abate, brother Paolo, helped most
At words when deeds were out of question, pushed
Nearest the purple, best played deputy,
So, pleaded, Guido's representative
At the court shall soon try Guido's self, — what 's more,
The court that also took — I told you, Sir —
That statement of the couple, how a cheat

Had been i' the birth of the babe, no child of theirs.
That was the prelude ; this, the play's first act :
Whereof we wait what comes, crown, close of all.

Well, the result was something of a shade
On the parties thus accused, — how otherwise ?
Shade, but with shine as unmistakable.
Each had a prompt defence : Pompilia first —
"Earth was made hell to me who did no harm :
I only could emerge one way from hell
By catching at the one hand held me, so
I caught at it and thereby stepped to heaven :
If that be wrong, do with me what you will ! "
Then Caponsacchi with a grave grand sweep
O' the arm as though his soul warned baseness off —
"If as a man, then much more as a priest
I hold me bound to help weak innocence :
If so my worldly reputation burst,
Being the bubble it is, why, burst it may :
Blame I can bear though not blameworthiness.
But use your sense first, see if the miscreant proved,
The man who tortured thus the woman, thus
Have not both laid the trap and fixed the lure
Over the pit should bury body and soul !
His facts are lies : his letters are the fact —
An infiltration flavored with himself !
As for the fancies — whether . . . what is it you say ?
The lady loves me, whether I love her
In the forbidden sense of your surmise, —
If, with the mid-day blaze of truth above,
The unlidded eye of God awake, aware,
You needs must pry about and trace the birth
Of each stray beam of light may traverse night,
To the night's sun that 's Lucifer himself,
Do so, at other time, in other place,
Not now nor here ! Enough that first to last
I never touched her lip nor she my hand,
Nor either of us thought a thought, much less
Spoke a word which the Virgin might not hear.
Be such your question, thus I answer it."

Then the court had to make its mind up, spoke.
"It is a thorny question, yea, a tale
Hard to believe, but not impossible :
Who can be absolute for either side ?
A middle course is happily open yet.

Here has a blot surprised the social blank,—
Whether through favor, feebleness or fault,
No matter, leprosy has touched our robe
And we unclean must needs be purified.
Here is a wife makes holiday from home,
A priest caught playing truant to his church,
In masquerade moreover: both allege
Enough excuse to stop our lifted scourge
Which else would heavily fall. On the other hand,
Here is a husband, ay and man of mark,
Who comes complaining here, demands redress
As if he were the pattern of desert—
The while those plaguy allegations frown,
Forbid we grant him the redress he seeks.
To all men be our moderation known!
Rewarding none while compensating each,
Hurting all round though harming nobody,
Husband, wife, priest, scot-free not one shall 'scape,
Yet priest, wife, husband, boast the unbroken head
From application of our excellent oil:
So that, whatever be the fact, in fine,
We make no miss of justice in a sort.
First, let the husband stomach as he may,
His wife shall neither be returned him, no—
Nor branded, whipped and caged, but just consigned
To a convent and the quietude she craves;
So is he rid of his domestic plague:
What better thing can happen to a man?
Next, let the priest retire—unshent, unshamed,
Unpunished as for perpetrating crime,
But relegated (not imprisoned, Sirs!)
Sent for three years to clarify his youth
At Civita, a rest by the way to Rome:
There let his life skim off its last of lees
Nor keep this dubious color. Judged the cause:
All parties may retire, content, we hope."
That 's Rome's way, the traditional road of law;
Whither it leads is what remains to tell.

The priest went to his relegation-place,
The wife to her convent, brother Paolo
To the arms of brother Guido with the news
And this beside—his charge was countercharged;
The Comparini, his old brace of hates,
Were breathed and vigilant and venomous now—
Had shot a second bolt where the first stuck,

And followed up the pending dowry-suit
By a procedure should release the wife
From so much of the marriage-bond as barred
Escape when Guido turned the screw too much
On his wife's flesh and blood, as husband may.
No more defence, she turned and made attack,
Claimed now divorce from bed and board, in short:
Pleaded such subtle strokes of cruelty,
Such slow sure siege laid to her body and soul,
As, proved, — and proofs seemed coming thick and fast, —
Would gain both freedom and the dowry back
Even should the first suit leave them in his grasp:
So urged the Comparini for the wife.
Guido had gained not one of the good things
He grasped at by his creditable plan
O' the flight and following and the rest: the suit
That smouldered late was fanned to fury new,
This adjunct came to help with fiercer fire,
While he had got himself a quite new plague —
Found the world's face an universal grin
At this last best of the Hundred Merry Tales
Of how a young and spritely clerk devised
To carry off a spouse that moped too much,
And cured her of the vapors in a trice:
And how the husband, playing Vulcan's part,
Told by the Sun, started in hot pursuit
To catch the lovers, and came halting up,
Cast his net, and then called the Gods to see
The convicts in their rosy impudence —
Whereat said Mercury "Would that I were Mars!"
Oh it was rare, and naughty all the same!
Brief, the wife's courage and cunning, — the priest's show
Of chivalry and adroitness, — last not least,
The husband — how he ne'er showed teeth at all,
Whose bark had promised biting; but just sneaked
Back to his kennel, tail 'twixt legs, as 't were, —
All this was hard to gulp down and digest.
So pays the devil his liegeman, brass for gold.
But this was at Arezzo: here in Rome
Brave Paolo bore up against it all —
Battled it out, nor wanting to himself
Nor Guido nor the House whose weight he bore
Pillar-like, by no force of arm but brain.
He knew his Rome, what wheels to set to work;
Plied influential folk, pressed to the ear
Of the efficacious purple, pushed his way

To the old Pope's self, — past decency indeed, —
Praying him take the matter in his hands
Out of the regular court's incompetence.
But times are changed and nephews out of date
And favoritism unfashionable: the Pope
Said "Render Cæsar what is Cæsar's due!"
As for the Comparini's counter-plea,
He met that by a counter-plea again,
Made Guido claim divorce — with help so far
By the trial's issue: for, why punishment
However slight unless for guiltiness
However slender? — and a molehill serves
Much as a mountain of offence this way.
So was he gathering strength on every side
And growing more and more to menace — when
All of a terrible moment came the blow
That beat down Paolo's fence, ended the play
O' the foil and brought Mannaia on the stage.

Five months had passed now since Pompilia's flight,
Months spent in peace among the Convert nuns:
This, — being, as it seemed, for Guido's sake
Solely, what pride might call imprisonment
And quote as something gained, to friends at home, —
This naturally was at Guido's charge:
Grudge it he might, but penitential fare,
Prayers, preachings, who but he defrayed the cost?
So, Paolo dropped, as proxy, doit by doit
Like heart's blood, till — what's here? What notice comes?
The Convent's self makes application bland
That, since Pompilia's health is fast o' the wane,
She may have leave to go combine her cure
Of soul with cure of body, mend her mind
Together with her thin arms and sunk eyes
That want fresh air outside the convent-wall,
Say in a friendly house, — and which so fit
As a certain villa in the Pauline way,
That happens to hold Pietro and his wife,
The natural guardians? "Oh, and shift the care
You shift the cost, too; Pietro pays in turn,
And lightens Guido of a load! And then,
Villa or convent, two names for one thing,
Always the sojourn means imprisonment,
Domus pro carcere — nowise we relax,
Nothing abate: how answers Paolo?"

You,
What would you answer? All so smooth and fair,
Even Paul's astuteness sniffed no harm i' the world.
He authorized the transfer, saw it made
And, two months after, reaped the fruit of the same,
Having to sit down, rack his brain and find
What phrase should serve him best to notify
Our Guido that by happy providence
A son and heir, a babe was born to him
I' the villa, — go tell sympathizing friends!
Yes, such had been Pompilia's privilege:
She, when she fled, was one month gone with child,
Known to herself or unknown, either way
Availing to explain (say men of art)
The strange and passionate precipitance
Of maiden startled into motherhood
Which changes body and soul by nature's law.
So when the she-dove breeds, strange yearnings come
For the unknown shelter by undreamed-of shores,
And there is born a blood-pulse in her heart
To fight if needs be, though with flap of wing,
For the wool-flock or the fur-tuft, though a hawk
Contest the prize, — wherefore, she knows not yet.
Anyhow, thus to Guido came the news.
"I shall have quitted Rome ere you arrive
To take the one step left," — wrote Paolo.
Then did the winch o' the winepress of all hate,
Vanity, disappointment, grudge and greed,
Take the last turn that screws out pure revenge
With a bright bubble at the brim beside —
By an heir's birth he was assured at once
O' the main prize, all the money in dispute:
Pompilia's dowry might revert to her
Or stay with him as law's caprice should point, —
But now — now — what was Pietro's shall be hers,
What was hers shall remain her own, — if hers,
Why then, — oh, not her husband's but — her heir's!
That heir being his too, all grew his at last
By this road or by that road, since they join.
Before, why, push he Pietro out o' the world, —
The current of the money stopped, you see,
Pompilia being proved no Pietro's child:
Or let it be Pompilia's life he quenched,
Again the current of the money stopped, —
Guido debarred his rights as husband soon,
So the new process threatened; — now, the chance,

Now, the resplendent minute! Clear the earth,
Cleanse the house, let the three but disappear,
A child remains, depositary of all,
That Guido may enjoy his own again,
Repair all losses by a master-stroke,
Wipe out the past, all done all left undone,
Swell the good present to best evermore,
Die into new life, which let blood baptize!

So, i' the blue of a sudden sulphur-blaze,
Both why there was one step to take at Rome,
And why he should not meet with Paolo there,
He saw — the ins and outs to the heart of hell —
And took the straight line thither swift and sure.
He rushed to Vittiano, found four sons o' the soil,
Brutes of his breeding, with one spark i' the clod
That served for a soul, the looking up to him
Or aught called Franceschini as life, death,
Heaven, hell, — lord paramount, assembled these,
Harangued, equipped, instructed, pressed each clod
With his will's imprint; then took horse, plied spur,
And so arrived, all five of them, at Rome
On Christmas-Eve, and forthwith found themselves
Installed i' the vacancy and solitude
Left them by Paolo, the considerate man
Who, good as his word, had disappeared at once
As if to leave the stage free. A whole week
Did Guido spend in study of his part,
Then played it fearless of a failure. One,
Struck the year's clock whereof the hours are days,
And off was rung o' the little wheels the chime
"Good will on earth and peace to man:" but, two,
Proceeded the same bell, and, evening come,
The dreadful five felt finger-wise their way
Across the town by blind cuts and black turns
To the little lone suburban villa; knocked —
"Who may be outside?" called a well-known voice.
"A friend of Caponsacchi's bringing friends
A letter."
That 's a test, the excusers say:
Ay, and a test conclusive, I return.
What? Had that name brought touch of guilt or taste
Of fear with it, aught to dash the present joy
With memory of the sorrow just at end, —
She, happy in her parents' arms at length,
With the new blessing of the two-weeks' babe, —

How had that name's announcement moved the wife?
Or, as the other slanders circulate,
Were Caponsacchi no rare visitant
On nights and days whither safe harbor lured,
What bait had been i' the name to ope the door?
The promise of a letter? Stealthy guests
Have secret watchwords, private entrances:
The man's own self might have been found inside
And all the scheme made frustrate by a word.
No: but since Guido knew, none knew so well,
The man had never since returned to Rome
Nor seen the wife's face more than villa's front,
So, could not be at hand to warn or save, —
For that, he took this sure way to the end.

"Come in," bade poor Violante cheerfully,
Drawing the door-bolt: that death was the first,
Stabbed through and through. Pietro, close on her heels,
Set up a cry — "Let me confess myself!
Grant but confession!" Cold steel was the grant.
Then came Pompilia's turn.
Then they escaped.
The noise o' the slaughter roused the neighborhood.
They had forgotten just the one thing more
Which saves i' the circumstance, the ticket, to wit,
Which puts post-horses at a traveller's use:
So, all on foot, desperate through the dark
Reeled they like drunkards along open road,
Accomplished a prodigious twenty miles
Homeward, and gained Baccano very near,
Stumbled at last, deaf, dumb, blind through the feat,
Into a grange and, one dead heap, slept there
Till the pursuers hard upon their trace
Reached them and took them, red from head to heel,
And brought them to the prison where they lie.
The couple were laid i' the church two days ago,
And the wife lives yet by miracle.

All is told.
You hardly need ask what Count Guido says,
Since something he must say. "I own the deed —"
(He cannot choose, — but —) "I declare the same
Just and inevitable, — since no way else
Was left me, but by this of taking life,
To save my honor which is more than life.
I exercised a husband's rights." To which

The answer is as prompt — "There was no fault
In any one o' the three to punish thus:
Neither i' the wife, who kept all faith to you,
Nor in the parents, whom yourself first duped,
Robbed and maltreated, then turned out of doors.
You wronged and they endured wrong; yours the fault.
Next, had endurance overpassed the mark
And turned resentment needing remedy, —
Nay, put the absurd impossible case, for once —
You were all blameless of the blame alleged
And they blameworthy where you fix all blame.
Still, why this violation of the law?
Yourself elected law should take its course,
Avenge wrong, or show vengeance not your right;
Why, only when the balance in law's hand
Trembles against you and inclines the way
O' the other party, do you make protest,
Renounce arbitrament, flying out of court,
And crying 'Honor's hurt the sword must cure'?
Aha, and so i' the middle of each suit
Trying i' the courts, — and you had three in play
With an appeal to the Pope's self beside, —
What, you may chop and change and right your wrongs,
Leaving the law to lag as she thinks fit?"

That were too temptingly commodious, Count!
One would have still a remedy in reserve
Should reach the safest oldest sinner, you see!
One's honor forsooth? Does that take hurt alone
From the extreme outrage? I who have no wife,
Being yet sensitive in my degree
As Guido, — must discover hurt elsewhere
Which, half compounded for in days gone by,
May profitably break out now afresh,
Need cure from my own expeditious hands.
The lie that was, as it were, imputed me
When you objected to my contract's clause, —
The theft as good as, one may say, alleged,
When you, co-heir in a will, excepted, Sir,
To my administration of effects,
— Aha, do you think law disposed of these?
My honor 's touched and shall deal death around!
Count, that were too commodious, I repeat!
If any law be imperative on us all,
Of all are you the enemy: out with you
From the common light and air and life of man!

IV.

TERTIUM QUID.

True, Excellency — as his Highness says,
Though she 's not dead yet, she 's as good as stretched
Symmetrical beside the other two;
Though he 's not judged yet, he 's the same as judged,
So do the facts abound and superabound:
And nothing hinders that we lift the case
Out of the shade into the shine, allow
Qualified persons to pronounce at last,
Nay, edge in an authoritative word
Between this rabble's-brabble of dolts and fools
Who make up reasonless unreasoning Rome.
"Now for the Trial!" they roar: "the Trial to test
The truth, weigh husband and weigh wife alike
I' the scales of law, make one scale kick the beam!"
Law 's a machine from which, to please the mob,
Truth the divinity must needs descend
And clear things at the play's fifth act — aha!
Hammer into their noddles who was who
And what was what. I tell the simpletons,
"Could law be competent to such a feat
'T were done already: what begins next week
Is end o' the Trial, last link of a chain
Whereof the first was forged three years ago
When law addressed herself to set wrong right,
And proved so slow in taking the first step
That ever some new grievance, — tort, retort,
On one or the other side, — o'ertook i' the game,
Retarded sentence, till this deed of death
Is thrown in, as it were, last bale to boat
Crammed to the edge with cargo — or passengers?
'*Trecentos inseris: ohe, jam satis est!*
Huc appelle!' — passengers, the word must be."
Long since, the boat was loaded to my eyes.
To hear the rabble and brabble, you 'd call the case
Fused and confused past human finding out.
One calls the square round, t' other the round square —

And pardonably in that first surprise
O' the blood that fell and splashed the diagram:
But now we 've used our eyes to the violent hue
Can't we look through the crimson and trace lines?
It makes a man despair of history,
Eusebius and the established fact — fig's end!
Oh, give the fools their Trial, rattle away
With the leash of lawyers, two on either side —
One barks, one bites, — Masters Arcangeli
And Spreti, — that 's the husband's ultimate hope
Against the Fisc and the other kind of Fisc,
Bound to do barking for the wife: bow — wow!
Why, Excellency, we and his Highness here
Would settle the matter as sufficiently
As ever will Advocate This and Fiscal That
And Judge the Other, with even — a word and a wink —
We well know who for ultimate arbiter.
Let us beware o' the basset-table — lest
We jog the elbow of Her Eminence,
Jostle his cards, — he 'll rap you out a . . . . st!
By the window-seat! And here 's the Marquis too!
Indulge me but a moment: if I fail
— Favored with such an audience, understand! —
To set things right, why, class me with the mob
As understander of the mind of man!

The mob, — now, that 's just how the error comes!
Bethink you that you have to deal with *plebs*,
The commonalty; this is an episode
In burgess-life, — why seek to aggrandize,
Idealize, denaturalize the class?
People talk just as if they had to do
With a noble pair that . . . Excellency, your ear!
Stoop to me, Highness, — listen and look yourselves!

This Pietro, this Violante, live their life
At Rome in the easy way that 's far from worst
Even for their betters, — themselves love themselves,
Spend their own oil in feeding their own lamp
That their own faces may grow bright thereby.
They get to fifty and over: how 's the lamp?
Full to the depth o' the wick, — moneys so much;
And also with a remnant, — so much more
Of moneys, — which there 's no consuming now,
But, when the wick shall moulder out some day,
Failing fresh twist of tow to use up dregs,

Will lie a prize for the passer-by, — to wit,
Any one that can prove himself the heir,
Seeing, the couple are wanting in a child:
Meantime their wick swims in the safe broad bowl
O' the middle rank, — not raised a beacon's height
For wind to ravage, nor dropped till lamp graze ground
Like cresset, mudlarks poke now here now there,
Going their rounds to probe the ruts i' the road
Or fish the luck o' the puddle. Pietro's soul
Was satisfied when crony smirked, "No wine
Like Pietro's, and he drinks it every day!"
His wife's heart swelled her bodice, joyed its fill
When neighbors turned heads wistfully at church,
Sighed at the load of lace that came to pray.
Well, having got through fifty years of flare,
They burn out so, indulge so their dear selves,
That Pietro finds himself in debt at last,
As he were any lordling of us all:
And, now that dark begins to creep on day,
Creditors grow uneasy, talk aside,
Take counsel, then importune all at once.
For if the good fat rosy careless man,
Who has not laid a ducat by, decease —
Let the lamp fall, no heir at hand to catch —
Why, being childless, there 's a spilth i' the street
O' the remnant, there 's a scramble for the dregs
By the stranger: so, they grant him no long day
But come in a body, clamor to be paid.

What 's his resource? He asks and straight obtains
The customary largess, dole dealt out
To, what we call our "poor dear shamefaced ones,"
In secret once a month to spare the shame
O' the slothful and the spendthrift, — pauper-saints
The Pope puts meat i' the mouth of, ravens they,
And providence he — just what the mob admires!
That is, instead of putting a prompt foot
On selfish worthless human slugs whose slime
Has failed to lubricate their path in life,
Why, the Pope picks the first ripe fruit that falls
And gracious puts it in the vermin's way.
Pietro could never save a dollar? Straight
He must be subsidized at our expense:
And for his wife — the harmless household sheep
One ought not to see harassed in her age —
Judge, by the way she bore adversity,

O' the patient nature you ask pity for!
How long, now, would the roughest marketman,
Handling the creatures huddled to the knife,
Harass a mutton ere she made a mouth
Or menaced biting? Yet the poor sheep here,
Violante, the old innocent burgess-wife,
In her first difficulty showed great teeth
Fit to crunch up and swallow a good round crime.
She meditates the tenure of the Trust,
Fidei commissum is the lawyer-phrase,
These funds that only want an heir to take —
Goes o'er the gamut o' the creditor's cry
By semitones from whine to snarl high up
And growl down low, one scale in sundry keys, —
Pauses with a little compunction for the face
Of Pietro frustrate of its ancient cheer, —
Never a bottle now for friend at need, —
Comes to a stop on her own frittered lace
And neighborly condolences thereat,
Then makes her mind up, sees the thing to do:
And so, deliberate, snaps house-book clasp,
Posts off to vespers, missal beneath arm,
Passes the proper San Lorenzo by,
Dives down a little lane to the left, is lost
In a labyrinth of dwellings best unnamed,
Selects a certain blind one, black at base,
Blinking at top, — the sign of we know what, —
One candle in a casement set to wink
Streetward, do service to no shrine inside, —
Mounts thither by the filthy flight of stairs,
Holding the cord by the wall, to the tip-top,
Gropes for the door i' the dark, ajar of course,
Raps, opens, enters in: up starts a thing
Naked as needs be — "What, you rogue, 't is you?
Back, — how can I have taken a farthing yet?
Mercy on me, poor sinner that I am!
Here 's . . . why, I took you for Madonna's self
With all that sudden swirl of silk i' the place!
What may your pleasure be, my bonny dame?"
Your Excellency supplies aught left obscure?
One of those women that abound in Rome,
Whose needs oblige them eke out one poor trade
By another vile one: her ostensible work
Was washing clothes, out in the open air
At the cistern by Citorio; her true trade —
Whispering to idlers, when they stopped and praised

The ankles she let liberally shine
In kneeling at the slab by the fountain-side,
That there was plenty more to criticise
At home, that eve, i' the house where candle blinked
Decorously above, and all was done
I' the holy fear of God and cheap beside.
Violante, now, had seen this woman wash,
Noticed and envied her propitious shape,
Tracked her home to her house-top, noted too,
And now was come to tempt her and propose
A bargain far more shameful than the first
Which trafficked her virginity away
For a melon and three pauls at twelve years old.
Five minutes' talk with this poor child of Eve,
Struck was the bargain, business at an end —
"Then, six months hence, that person whom you trust,
Comes, fetches whatsoever babe it be;
I keep the price and secret, you the babe,
Paying beside for mass to make all straight:
Meantime, I pouch the earnest-money-piece."

Down-stairs again goes fumbling by the rope
Violante, triumphing in a flourish of fire
From her own brain, self-lit by such success, —
Gains church in time for the *Magnificat*,
And gives forth "My reproof is taken away,
And blessed shall mankind proclaim me now,"
So that the officiating priest turns round
To see who proffers the obstreperous praise:
Then home to Pietro, the enraptured-much
But puzzled-more when told the wondrous news —
How orisons and works of charity,
(Beside that pair of pinners and a coif,
Birthday surprise last Wednesday was five weeks)
Had borne fruit in the autumn of his life, —
They, or the Orvieto in a double dose.
Anyhow, she must keep house next six months,
Lie on the settle, avoid the three-legged stool,
And, chiefly, not be crossed in wish or whim,
And the result was like to be an heir.

Accordingly, when time was come about,
He found himself the sire indeed of this
Francesca Vittoria Pompilia and the rest
O' the names whereby he sealed her his, next day.
A crime complete in its way is here, I hope?

Lies to God, lies to man, every way lies
To nature and civility and the mode:
Flat robbery of the proper heirs thus foiled
O' the due succession, — and, what followed thence,
Robbery of God, through the confessor's ear
Debarred the most noteworthy incident
When all else done and undone twelvemonth through
Was put in evidence at Easter-time.
All other peccadillos! — but this one
To the priest who comes next day to dine with us?
'T were inexpedient; decency forbade.

Is so far clear? You know Violante now,
Compute her capability of crime
By this authentic instance? Black hard cold
Crime like a stone you kick up with your foot
I' the middle of a field?

I thought as much.
But now, a question, — how long does it lie,
The bad and barren bit of stuff you kick,
Before encroached on and encompassed round
With minute moss, weed, wild-flower — made alive
By worm, and fly, and foot of the free bird?
Your Highness, — healthy minds let bygones be,
Leave old crimes to grow young and virtuous-like
I' the sun and air; so time treats ugly deeds:
They take the natural blessing of all change.
There was the joy o' the husband silly-sooth,
The softening of the wife's old wicked heart,
Virtues to right and left, profusely paid
If so they might compensate the saved sin.
And then the sudden existence, dewy-dear,
O' the rose above the dungheap, the pure child
As good as new created, since withdrawn
From the horror of the pre-appointed lot
With the unknown father and the mother known
Too well, — some fourteen years of squalid youth,
And then libertinage, disease, the grave —
Hell in life here, hereafter life in hell:
Look at that horror and this soft repose!
Why, moralist, the sin has saved a soul!
Then, even the palpable grievance to the heirs —
'Faith, this was no frank setting hand to throat
And robbing a man, but . . . Excellency, by your leave,
How did you get that marvel of a gem,

The sapphire with the Graces grand and Greek?
The story is, stooping to pick a stone
From the pathway through a vineyard — no-man's-land —
To pelt a sparrow with, you chanced on this:
Why now, do those five clowns o' the family
O' the vinedresser digest their porridge worse
That not one keeps it in his goatskin pouch
To do flint's-service with the tinder-box?
Don't cheat me, don't cheat you, don't cheat a friend!
But are you so hard on who jostles just
A stranger with no natural sort of claim
To the havings and the holdings (here 's the point)
Unless by misadventure, and defect
Of that which ought to be — nay, which there 's none
Would dare so much as wish to profit by —
Since who dares put in just so many words
"May Pietro fail to have a child, please God!
So shall his house and goods belong to me,
The sooner that his heart will pine betimes"?
Well then, God does n't please, nor heart shall pine!
Because he has a child at last, you see,
Or selfsame thing as though a child it were,
He thinks, whose sole concern it is to think:
If he accepts it why should you demur?

Moreover, say that certain sin there seem,
The proper process of unsinning sin
Is to begin well-doing somehow else.
Pietro, — remember, with no sin at all
I' the substitution, — why, this gift of God
Flung in his lap from over Paradise
Steadied him in a moment, set him straight
On the good path he had been straying from.
Henceforward no more wilfulness and waste,
Cuppings, carousings, — these a sponge wiped out.
All sort of self-denial was easy now
For the child's sake, the chatelaine to be,
Who must want much and might want who knows what?
And so, the debts were paid, habits reformed,
Expense curtailed, the dowry set to grow.
As for the wife, — I said, hers the whole sin:
So, hers the exemplary penance. 'T was a text
Whereon folk preached and praised, the district through:
"Oh, make us happy and you make us good!
It all comes of God giving her a child:
Such graces follow God's best earthly gift!"

Here you put by my guard, pass to my heart
By the home-thrust — "There 's a lie at base of all."
Why, thou exact Prince, is it a pearl or no,
Yon globe upon the Principessa's neck?
That great round glory of pellucid stuff,
A fish secreted round a grain of grit!
Do you call it worthless for the worthless core?
(She does n't, who well knows what she changed for it.)
So, to our brace of burgesses again!
You see so far i' the story, who was right,
Who wrong, who neither, don't you? What, you don't?
Eh? Well, admit there 's somewhat dark i' the case,
Let 's on — the rest shall clear, I promise you.
Leap over a dozen years: you find, these passed,
An old good easy creditable sire,
A careful housewife's beaming bustling face,
Both wrapped up in the love of their one child,
The strange tall pale beautiful creature grown
Lily-like out o' the cleft i' the sun-smit rock
To bow its white miraculous birth of buds
I' the way of wandering Joseph and his spouse, —
So painters fancy: here it was a fact.
And this their lily, — could they but transplant
And set in vase to stand by Solomon's porch
'Twixt lion and lion! — this Pompilia of theirs,
Could they see worthily married, well bestowed,
In house and home! And why despair of this
With Rome to choose from, save the topmost rank?
Themselves would help the choice with heart and soul,
Throw their late savings in a common heap
To go with the dowry, and be followed in time
By the heritage legitimately hers:
And when such paragon was found and fixed,
Why, they might chant their "*Nunc dimittis*" straight.

Indeed the prize was simply full to a fault,
Exorbitant for the suitor they should seek,
And social class should choose among, these cits.
Yet there 's a latitude: exceptional white
Amid the general brown o' the species, lurks
A burgess nearly an aristocrat,
Legitimately in reach: look out for him!
What banker, merchant, has seen better days,
What second-rate painter a-pushing up,
Poet a-slipping down, shall bid the best
For this young beauty with the thumping purse?

Alack, were it but one of such as these
So like the real thing that they pass for it,
All had gone well! Unluckily, poor souls,
It proved to be the impossible thing itself;
Truth and not sham: hence ruin to them all.

For, Guido Franceschini was the head
Of an old family in Arezzo, old
To that degree they could afford be poor
Better than most: the case is common too.
Out of the vast door 'scutcheoned overhead,
Creeps out a serving-man on Saturdays
To cater for the week, — turns up anon
I' the market, chaffering for the lamb's least leg,
Or the quarter-fowl, less entrails, claws and comb:
Then back again with prize, — a liver begged
Into the bargain, gizzard overlooked.
He 's mincing these to give the beans a taste,
When, at your knock, he leaves the simmering soup,
Waits on the curious stranger-visitant,
Napkin in half-wiped hand, to show the rooms,
Point pictures out have hung their hundred years,
"Priceless," he tells you, — puts in his place at once
The man of money: yes, you 're banker-king
Or merchant-kaiser, wallow in your wealth
While patron, the house-master, can't afford
To stop our ceiling-hole that rain so rots:
But he 's the man of mark, and there 's his shield,
And yonder 's the famed Rafael, first in kind,
The painter painted for his grandfather,
And you have paid to see: "Good morning, Sir!"
Such is the law of compensation. Still
The poverty was getting nigh acute;
There gaped so many noble mouths to feed,
Beans must suffice unflavored of the fowl.
The mother, — hers would be a spun-out life
I' the nature of things; the sisters had done well
And married men of reasonable rank:
But that sort of illumination stops,
Throws back no heat upon the parent-hearth.
The family instinct felt out for its fire
To the Church, — the Church traditionally helps
A second son: and such was Paolo,
Established here at Rome these thirty years,
Who played the regular game, — priest and Abate,
Made friends, owned house and land, became of use

To a personage: his course lay clear enough.
The youngest caught the sympathetic flame,
And, though unfledged wings kept him still i' the cage,
Yet he shot up to be a Canon, so
Clung to the higher perch and crowed in hope.
Even our Guido, eldest brother, went
As far i' the way o' the Church as safety seemed,
He being Head o' the House, ordained to wive,—
So, could but dally with an Order or two
And testify good-will i' the cause: he clipt
His top-hair and thus far affected Christ.
But main promotion must fall otherwise,
Though still from the side o' the Church: and here was he
At Rome, since first youth, worn threadbare of soul
By forty-six years' rubbing on hard life,
Getting fast tired o' the game whose word is—"Wait!"
When one day,—he too having his Cardinal
To serve in some ambiguous sort, as serve
To draw the coach the plumes o' the horses' heads,—
The Cardinal saw fit to dispense with him,
Ride with one plume the less; and off it dropped.

Guido thus left,—with a youth spent in vain
And not a penny in purse to show for it,—
Advised with Paolo, bent no doubt in chafe
The black brows somewhat formidably, growled
"Where is the good I came to get at Rome?
Where the repayment of the servitude
To a purple popinjay, whose feet I kiss,
Knowing his father wiped the shoes of mine?"

"Patience," pats Paolo the recalcitrant—
"You have not had, so far, the proper luck,
Nor do my gains suffice to keep us both:
A modest competency is mine, not more.
You are the Count however, yours the style,
Heirdom and state,—you can't expect all good.
Had I, now, held your hand of cards . . . well, well—
What 's yet unplayed, I 'll look at, by your leave,
Over your shoulder,—I who made my game,
Let 's see, if I can't help to handle yours.
Fie on you, all the Honors in your fist,
Countship, Househeadship,—how have you misdealt!
Why, in the first place, these will marry a man!
Notum tonsoribus! To the Tonsor then!
Come, clear your looks, and choose your freshest suit,

And, after function 's done with, down we go
To the woman-dealer in perukes, a wench
I and some others settled in the shop
At Place Colonna: she 's an oracle. Hmm!
'Dear, 't is my brother: brother, 't is my dear.
Dear, give us counsel! Whom do you suggest
As properest party in the quarter round
For the Count here? — he is minded to take wife,
And further tells me he intends to slip
Twenty zecchines under the bottom-scalp
Of his old wig when he sends it to revive
For the wedding: and I add a trifle too.
You know what personage I 'm potent with.'"
And so plumped out Pompilia's name the first.
She told them of the household and its ways,
The easy husband and the shrewder wife
In Via Vittoria, — how the tall young girl,
With hair black as yon patch and eyes as big
As yon pomander to make freckles fly,
Would have so much for certain, and so much more
In likelihood, — why, it suited, slipt as smooth
As the Pope's pantoufle does on the Pope's foot.
"I 'll to the husband!" Guido ups and cries.
"Ay, so you 'd play your last court-card, no doubt!"
Puts Paolo in with a groan — "Only, you see,
'T is I, this time, that supervise your lead.
Priests play with women, maids, wives, mothers — why?
These play with men and take them off our hands.
Did I come, counsel with some cut-beard gruff
Or rather this sleek young-old barberess?
Go, brother, stand you rapt in the ante-room
Of Her Efficacity my Cardinal
For an hour, — he likes to have lord-suitors lounge, —
While I betake myself to the gray mare,
The better horse, — how wise the people's word! —
And wait on Madam Violante."

Said and done.
He was at Via Vittoria in three skips:
Proposed at once to fill up the one want
O' the burgess-family which, wealthy enough,
And comfortable to heart's desire, yet crouched
Outside a gate to heaven, — locked, bolted, barred,
Whereof Count Guido had a key he kept
Under his pillow, but Pompilia's hand
Might slide behind his neck and pilfer thence.
The key was fairy; its mere mention made

Violante feel the thing shoot one sharp ray
That reached the womanly heart: so — "I assent!
Yours be Pompilia, hers and ours that key
To all the glories of the greater life!
There's Pietro to convince: leave that to me!"

Then was the matter broached to Pietro; then
Did Pietro make demand and get response
That in the Countship was a truth, but in
The counting up of the Count's cash, a lie.
He thereupon stroked grave his chin, looked great,
Declined the honor. Then the wife wiped tear,
Winked with the other eye turned Paolo-ward,
Whispered Pompilia, stole to church at eve,
Found Guido there and got the marriage done,
And finally begged pardon at the feet
Of her dear lord and master. Whereupon
Quoth Pietro — "Let us make the best of things!"
"I knew your love would license us," quoth she:
Quoth Paolo once more, "Mothers, wives and maids,
These be the tools wherewith priests manage men."

Now, here take breath and ask, — which bird o' the brace
Decoyed the other into clapnet? Who
Was fool, who knave? Neither and both, perchance.
There was a bargain mentally proposed
On each side, straight and plain and fair enough;
Mind knew its own mind: but when mind must speak,
The bargain have expression in plain terms,
There came the blunder incident to words,
And in the clumsy process, fair turned foul.
The straight backbone-thought of the crooked speech
Were just — "I Guido truck my name and rank
For so much money and youth and female charms. —
We Pietro and Violante give our child
And wealth to you for a rise i' the world thereby."
Such naked truth while chambered in the brain
Shocks nowise: walk it forth by way of tongue, —
Out on the cynical unseemliness!
Hence was the need, on either side, of a lie
To serve as decent wrappage: so, Guido gives
Money for money, — and they, bride for groom,
Having, he, not a doit, they, not a child
Honestly theirs, but this poor waif and stray.
According to the words, each cheated each;
But in the inexpressive barter of thoughts,

Each did give and did take the thing designed,
The rank on this side and the cash on that —
Attained the object of the traffic, so.
The way of the world, the daily bargain struck
In the first market! Why sells Jack his ware?
"For the sake of serving an old customer."
Why does Jill buy it? "Simply not to break
A custom, pass the old stall the first time."
Why, you know where the gist is of the exchange:
Each sees a profit, throws the fine words in.
Don't be too hard o' the pair! Had each pretence
Been simultaneously discovered, stript
From off the body o' the transaction, just
As when a cook (will Excellency forgive?)
Strips away those long rough superfluous legs
From either side the crayfish, leaving folk
A meal all meat henceforth, no garnishry,
(With your respect, Prince!) — balance had been kept,
No party blamed the other, — so, starting fair,
All subsequent fence of wrong returned by wrong
I' the matrimonial thrust and parry, at least
Had followed on equal terms. But, as it chanced,
One party had the advantage, saw the cheat
Of the other first and kept its own concealed:
And the luck o' the first discovery fell, beside,
To the least adroit and self-possessed o' the pair.
'T was foolish Pietro and his wife saw first
The nobleman was penniless, and screamed
"We are cheated!"

Such unprofitable noise
Angers at all times: but when those who plague,
Do it from inside your own house and home,
Gnats which yourself have closed the curtain round,
Noise goes too near the brain and makes you mad.
The gnats say, Guido used the candle-flame
Unfairly, — worsened that first bad of his,
By practising all kinds of cruelty
To oust them and suppress the wail and whine, —
That speedily he so scared and bullied them,
Fain were they, long before five months had passed,
To beg him grant, from what was once their wealth,
Just so much as would help them back to Rome,
Where, when they finished paying the last doit
O' the dowry, they might beg from door to door.
So say the Comparini — as if it came

Of pure resentment for this worse than bad,
That then Violante, feeling conscience prick,
Confessed her substitution of the child
Whence all the harm fell, — and that Pietro first
Bethought him of advantage to himself
I' the deed, as part revenge, part remedy
For all miscalculation in the pact.

On the other hand, "Not so!" Guido retorts —
"I am the wronged, solely, from first to last,
Who gave the dignity I engaged to give,
Which was, is, cannot but continue gain.
My being poor was a by-circumstance,
Miscalculated piece of untowardness,
Might end to-morrow did heaven's windows ope,
Or uncle die and leave me his estate.
You should have put up with the minor flaw,
Getting the main prize of the jewel. If wealth,
Not rank, had been prime object in your thoughts,
Why not have taken the butcher's son, the boy
O' the baker or candlestick-maker? In all the rest,
It was yourselves broke compact and played false,
And made a life in common impossible.
Show me the stipulation of our bond
That you should make your profit of being inside
My house, to hustle and edge me out o' the same,
First make a laughing-stock of mine and me,
Then round us in the ears from morn to night
(Because we show wry faces at your mirth)
That you are robbed, starved, beaten and what not!
You fled a hell of your own lighting-up,
Pay for your own miscalculation too:
You thought nobility, gained at any price,
Would suit and satisfy, — find the mistake,
And now retaliate, not on yourselves, but me.
And how? By telling me, i' the face of the world,
I it is have been cheated all this while,
Abominably and irreparably, — my name
Given to a cur-cast mongrel, a drab's brat,
A beggar's by-blow, — thus depriving me
Of what yourselves allege the whole and sole
Aim on my part i' the marriage, — money, to wit.
This thrust I have to parry by a guard
Which leaves me open to a counter-thrust
On the other side, — no way but there 's a pass
Clean through me. If I prove, as I hope to do,

There 's not one truth in this your odious tale
O' the buying, selling, substituting — prove
Your daughter was and is your daughter, — well,
And her dowry hers and therefore mine, — what then?
Why, where 's the appropriate punishment for this
Enormous lie hatched for mere malice' sake
To ruin me? Is that a wrong or no?
And if I try revenge for remedy,
Can I well make it strong and bitter enough?"

I anticipate however — only ask,
Which of the two here sinned most? A nice point!
Which brownness is least black, — decide who can,
Wager-by-battle-of-cheating! What do you say,
Highness? Suppose, your Excellency, we leave
The question at this stage, proceed to the next,
Both parties step out, fight their prize upon,
In the eye o' the world?

They brandish law 'gainst law;
The grinding of such blades, each parry of each,
Throws terrible sparks off, over and above the thrusts,
And makes more sinister the fight, to the eye,
Than the very wounds that follow. Beside the tale
Which the Comparini have to re-assert,
They needs must write, print, publish all abroad
The straitnesses of Guido's household life —
The petty nothings we bear privately
But break down under when fools flock to jeer.
What is it all to the facts o' the couple's case,
How helps it prove Pompilia not their child,
If Guido's mother, brother, kith and kin
Fare ill, lie hard, lack clothes, lack fire, lack food?
That 's one more wrong than needs.

On the other hand,
Guido, — whose cue is to dispute the truth
O' the tale, reject the shame it throws on him, —
He may retaliate, fight his foe in turn
And welcome, we allow. Ay, but he can't!
He 's at home, only acts by proxy here;
Law may meet law, — but all the gibes and jeers,
The superfluity of naughtiness,
Those libels on his House, — how reach at them?
Two hateful faces, grinning all aglow,
Not only make parade of spoil they filched,

But foul him from the height of a tower, you see.
Unluckily temptation is at hand —
To take revenge on a trifle overlooked,
A pet lamb they have left in reach outside,
Whose first bleat, when he plucks the wool away,
Will strike the grinners grave: his wife remains,
Who, four months earlier, some thirteen years old,
Never a mile away from mother's house
And petted to the height of her desire,
Was told one morning that her fate had come,
She must be married — just as, a month before,
Her mother told her she must comb her hair
And twist her curls into one knot behind.
These fools forgot their pet lamb, fed with flowers,
Then 'ticed as usual by the bit of cake,
Out of the bower into the butchery.
Plague her, he plagues them threefold: but how plague?
The world may have its word to say to that:
You can't do some things with impunity.
What remains . . . well, it is an ugly thought . . .
But that he drive herself to plague herself —
Herself disgrace herself and so disgrace
Who seek to disgrace Guido?

There 's the clue
To what else seems gratuitously vile,
If, as is said, from this time forth the rack
Was tried upon Pompilia: 't was to wrench
Her limbs into exposure that brings shame.
The aim o' the cruelty being so crueller still,
That cruelty almost grows compassion's self
Could one attribute it to mere return
O' the parents' outrage, wrong avenging wrong.
They see in this a deeper deadlier aim,
Not to vex just a body they held dear,
But blacken too a soul they boasted white,
And show the world their saint in a lover's arms,
No matter how driven thither, — so they say.

On the other hand, so much is easily said,
And Guido lacks not an apologist.
The pair had nobody but themselves to blame,
Being selfish beasts throughout, no less, no more:
— Cared for themselves, their supposed good, nought else,
And brought about the marriage; good proved bad,
As little they cared for her its victim — nay,

Meant she should stay behind and take the chance,
If haply they might wriggle themselves free.
They baited their own hook to catch a fish
With this poor worm, failed o' the prize, and then
Sought how to unbait tackle, let worm float
Or sink, amuse the monster while they 'scaped.
Under the best stars Hymen brings above,
Had all been honesty on either side,
A common sincere effort to good end,
Still, this would prove a difficult problem, Prince!
— Given, a fair wife, aged thirteen years,
A husband poor, care-bitten, sorrow-sunk,
Little, long-nosed, bush-bearded, lantern-jawed,
Forty-six years old, — place the two grown one,
She, cut off sheer from every natural aid,
In a strange town with no familiar face —
He, in his own parade-ground or retreat
If need were, free from challenge, much less check
To an irritated, disappointed will —
How evolve happiness from such a match?
'T were hard to serve up a congenial dish
Out of these ill-agreeing morsels, Duke,
By the best exercise of the cook's craft,
Best interspersion of spice, salt and sweet!
But let two ghastly scullions concoct mess
With brimstone, pitch, vitriol and devil's-dung —
Throw in abuse o' the man, his body and soul,
Kith, kin and generation, shake all slab
At Rome, Arezzo, for the world to nose,
Then end by publishing, for fiend's arch-prank,
That, over and above sauce to the meat's self,
Why, even the meat, bedevilled thus in dish,
Was never a pheasant but a carrion-crow —
Prince, what will then the natural loathing be?
What wonder if this? — the compound plague o' the pair
Pricked Guido, — not to take the course they hoped,
That is, submit him to their statement's truth,
Accept its obvious promise of relief,
And thrust them out of doors the girl again
Since the girl's dowry would not enter there,
— Quit of the one if balked of the other: no!
Rather did rage and hate so work in him,
Their product proved the horrible conceit
That he should plot and plan and bring to pass
His wife might, of her own free will and deed,
Relieve him of her presence, get her gone,

And yet leave all the dowry safe behind,
Confirmed his own henceforward past dispute,
While blotting out, as by a belch of hell,
Their triumph in her misery and death.

You see, the man was Aretine, had touch
O' the subtle air that breeds the subtle wit;
Was noble too, of old blood thrice-refined
That shrinks from clownish coarseness in disgust:
Allow that such an one may take revenge,
You don't expect he 'll catch up stone and fling,
Or try cross-buttock, or whirl quarter-staff?
Instead of the honest drubbing clowns bestow,
When out of temper at the dinner spoilt,
On meddling mother-in-law and tiresome wife, —
Substitute for the clown a nobleman,
And you have Guido, practising, 't is said,
Immitigably from the very first,
The finer vengeance: this, they say, the fact
O' the famous letter shows — the writing traced
At Guido's instance by the timid wife
Over the pencilled words himself writ first —
Wherein she, who could neither write nor read,
Was made unblushingly declare a tale
To the brother, the Abate then in Rome,
How her putative parents had impressed,
On their departure, their enjoinment; bade
"We being safely arrived here, follow, you!
Poison your husband, rob, set fire to all,
And then by means o' the gallant you procure
With ease, by helpful eye and ready tongue,
Some brave youth ready to dare, do and die,
You shall run off and merrily reach Rome
Where we may live like flies in honey-pot:" —
Such being exact the programme of the course
Imputed her as carried to effect.

They also say, — to keep her straight therein,
All sort of torture was piled, pain on pain,
On either side Pompilia's path of life,
Built round about and over against by fear,
Circumvallated month by month, and week
By week, and day by day, and hour by hour,
Close, closer and yet closer still with pain,
No outlet from the encroaching pain save just
Where stood one savior like a piece of heaven,

Hell's arms would strain round but for this blue gap.
She, they say further, first tried every chink,
Every imaginable break i' the fire,
As way of escape: ran to the Commissary,
Who bade her not malign his friend her spouse;
Flung herself thrice at the Archbishop's feet,
Where three times the Archbishop let her lie,
Spend her whole sorrow and sob full heart forth,
And then took up the slight load from the ground
And bore it back for husband to chastise, —
Mildly of course, — but natural right is right.
So went she slipping ever yet catching at help,
Missing the high till come to lowest and last,
To wit, a certain friar of mean degree,
Who heard her story in confession, wept,
Crossed himself, showed the man within the monk.
"Then, will you save me, you the one i' the world?
I cannot even write my woes, nor put
My prayer for help in words a friend may read, —
I no more own a coin than have an hour
Free of observance, — I was watched to church,
Am watched now, shall be watched back presently, —
How buy the skill of scribe i' the market-place?
Pray you, write down and send whatever I say
O' the need I have my parents take me hence!"
The good man rubbed his eyes and could not choose —
Let her dictate her letter in such a sense
That parents, to save breaking down a wall,
Might lift her over: she went back, heaven in heart.
Then the good man took counsel of his couch,
Woke and thought twice, the second thought the best:
"Here am I, foolish body that I be,
Caught all but pushing, teaching, who but I,
My betters their plain duty, — what, I dare
Help a case the Archbishop would not help,
Mend matters, peradventure, God loves mar?
What hath the married life but strifes and plagues
For proper dispensation? So a fool
Once touched the ark, — poor Uzzah that I am!
Oh married ones, much rather should I bid,
In patience all of ye possess your souls!
This life is brief and troubles die with it:
Where were the prick to soar up homeward else?"
So saying, he burnt the letter he had writ,
Said *Ave* for her intention, in its place,
Took snuff and comfort, and had done with all.

Then the grim arms stretched yet a little more
And each touched each, all but one streak i' the midst,
Whereat stood Caponsacchi, who cried, "This way,
Out by me! Hesitate one moment more
And the fire shuts out me and shuts in you!
Here my hand holds you life out!" Whereupon
She clasped the hand, which closed on hers and drew
Pompilia out o' the circle now complete.
Whose fault or shame but Guido's? — ask her friends.

But then this is the wife's — Pompilia's tale —
Eve's . . . no, not Eve's, since Eve, to speak the truth,
Was hardly fallen (our candor might pronounce)
When simply saying in her own defence
"The serpent tempted me and I did eat."
So much of paradisal nature, Eve's!
Her daughters ever since prefer to urge
"Adam so starved me I was fain accept
The apple any serpent pushed my way."
What an elaborate theory have we here,
Ingeniously nursed up, pretentiously
Brought forth, pushed forward amid trumpet-blast,
To account for the thawing of an icicle,
Show us there needed Ætna vomit flame
Ere run the crystal into dewdrops! Else,
How, unless hell broke loose to cause the step,
How could a married lady go astray?
Bless the fools! And 't is just this way they are blessed,
And the world wags still, — because fools are sure
— Oh, not of my wife nor your daughter! No!
But of their own: the case is altered quite.
Look now, — last week, the lady we all love, —
Daughter o' the couple we all venerate,
Wife of the husband we all cap before,
Mother o' the babes we all breathe blessings on, —
Was caught in converse with a negro page.
Hell thawed that icicle, else "Why was it —
Why?" asked and echoed the fools. "Because, you fools, —"
So did the dame's self answer, she who could,
With that fine candor only forthcoming
When 't is no odds whether withheld or no —
"Because my husband was the saint you say,
And, — with that childish goodness, absurd faith,
Stupid self-satisfaction, you so praise, —
Saint to you, insupportable to me.
Had he, — instead of calling me fine names,

Lucretia and Susanna and so forth,
And curtaining Correggio carefully
Lest I be taught that Leda had two legs, —
— But once never so little tweaked my nose
For peeping through my fan at Carnival,
Confessing thereby 'I have no easy task —
I need use all my powers to hold you mine,
And then, — why 't is so doubtful if they serve,
That — take this, as an earnest of despair!'
Why, we were quits: I had wiped the harm away,
Thought 'The man fears me!' and foregone revenge."
We must not want all this elaborate work
To solve the problem why young Fancy-and-flesh
Slips from the dull side of a spouse in years,
Betakes it to the breast of Brisk-and-bold
Whose love-scrapes furnish talk for all the town!

Accordingly, one word on the other side
Tips over the piled-up fabric of a tale.
Guido says — that is, always, his friends say —
It is unlikely from the wickedness,
That any man treat any woman so.
The letter in question was her very own,
Unprompted and unaided: she could write —
As able to write as ready to sin, or free,
When there was danger, to deny both facts.
He bids you mark, herself from first to last
Attributes all the so-styled torture just
To jealousy, — jealousy of whom but just
This very Caponsacchi! How suits here
This with the other alleged motive, Prince?
Would Guido make a terror of the man
He meant should tempt the woman, as they charge?
Do you fright your hare that you may catch your hare?
Consider too, the charge was made and met
At the proper time and place where proofs were plain —
Heard patiently and disposed of thoroughly
By the highest powers, possessors of most light,
The Governor for the law, and the Archbishop
For the gospel: which acknowledged primacies,
'T is impudently pleaded, he could warp
Into a tacit partnership with crime —
He being the while, believe their own account,
Impotent, penniless and miserable!
He further asks — Duke, note the knotty point! —
How he — concede him skill to play such part

And drive his wife into a gallant's arms —
Could bring the gallant to play his part too
And stand with arms so opportunely wide?
How bring this Caponsacchi, — with whom, friends
And foes alike agree, throughout his life
He never interchanged a civil word
Nor lifted courteous cap to — him, how bend
To such observancy of beck and call,
— To undertake this strange and perilous feat
For the good of Guido, using, as the lure,
Pompilia whom, himself and she avouch,
He had nor spoken with nor seen, indeed,
Beyond sight in a public theatre,
When she wrote letters (she that could not write!)
The importunate shamelessly-protested love
Which brought him, though reluctant, to her feet,
And forced on him the plunge which, howsoe'er
She might swim up i' the whirl, must bury him
Under abysmal black: a priest contrive
No better, no amour to be hushed up,
But open flight and noon-day infamy?
Try and concoct defence for such revolt!
Take the wife's tale as true, say she was wronged, —
Pray, in what rubric of the breviary
Do you find it registered — the part of a priest
Is — that to right wrongs from the church he skip,
Go journeying with a woman that 's a wife,
And be pursued, o'ertaken and captured . . . how?
In a lay-dress, playing the kind sentinel
Where the wife sleeps (says he who best should know)
And sleeping, sleepless, both have spent the night!
Could no one else be found to serve at need —
No woman — or if man, no safer sort
Than this not well-reputed turbulence?

Then, look into his own account o' the case!
He, being the stranger and astonished one,
Yet received protestations of her love
From lady neither known nor cared about:
Love, so protested, bred in him disgust
After the wonder, — or incredulity,
Such impudence seeming impossible.
But, soon assured such impudence might be,
When he had seen with his own eyes at last
Letters thrown down to him i' the very street
From behind lattice where the lady lurked,

And read their passionate summons to her side —
Why then, a thousand thoughts swarmed up and in, —
How he had seen her once, a moment's space,
Observed she was both young and beautiful,
Heard everywhere report she suffered much
From a jealous husband thrice her age, — in short,
There flashed the propriety, expediency
Of treating, trying might they come to terms,
— At all events, granting the interview
Prayed for, one so adapted to assist
Decision as to whether he advance,
Stand or retire, in his benevolent mood!
Therefore the interview befell at length;
And at this one and only interview,
He saw the sole and single course to take —
Bade her dispose of him, head, heart and hand,
Did her behest and braved the consequence,
Not for the natural end, the love of man
For woman whether love be virtue or vice,
But, please you, altogether for pity's sake —
Pity of innocence and helplessness!
And how did he assure himself of both?
Had he been the house-inmate, visitor,
Eye-witness of the described martyrdom,
So, competent to pronounce its remedy
Ere rush on such extreme and desperate course —
Involving such enormity of harm,
Moreover, to the husband judged thus, doomed
And damned without a word in his defence?
Not he! the truth was felt by instinct here,
— Process which saves a world of trouble and time.
There 's the priest's story: what do you say to it,
Trying its truth by your own instinct too,
Since that 's to be the expeditious mode?
"And now, do hear my version," Guido cries:
"I accept argument and inference both.
It would indeed have been miraculous
Had such a confidency sprung to birth
With no more fanning from acquaintanceship
Than here avowed by my wife and this priest.
Only, it did not: you must substitute
The old stale unromantic way of fault,
The commonplace adventure, mere intrigue
In prose form with the unpoetic tricks,
Cheatings and lies: they used the hackney chair
Satan jaunts forth with, shabby and serviceable,

No gilded jimcrack-novelty from below,
To bowl you along thither, swift and sure.
That same officious go-between, the wench
Who gave and took the letters of the two,
Now offers self and service back to me:
Bears testimony to visits night by night
When all was safe, the husband far and away, —
To many a timely slipping out at large
By light o' the morning-star, ere he should wake.
And when the fugitives were found at last,
Why, with them were found also, to belie
What protest they might make of innocence,
All documents yet wanting, if need were,
To establish guilt in them, disgrace in me —
The chronicle o' the converse from its rise
To culmination in this outrage: read!
Letters from wife to priest, from priest to wife, —
Here they are, read and say where they chime in
With the other tale, superlative purity
O' the pair of saints! I stand or fall by these."

But then on the other side again, — how say
The pair of saints? That not one word is theirs —
No syllable o' the batch or writ or sent
Or yet received by either of the two.
"Found," says the priest, "because he needed them,
Failing all other proofs, to prove our fault:
So, here they are, just as is natural.
Oh yes — we had our missives, each of us!
Not these, but to the full as vile, no doubt:
Hers as from me, — she could not read, so burnt, —
Mine as from her, — I burnt because I read.
Who forged and found them? *Cui profuerint!*"
(I take the phrase out of your Highness' mouth)
"He who would gain by her fault and my fall,
The trickster, schemer and pretender — he
Whose whole career was lie entailing lie
Sought to be sealed truth by the worst lie last!"

Guido rejoins — "Did the other end o' the tale
Match this beginning! 'T is alleged I prove
A murderer at the end, a man of force
Prompt, indiscriminate, effectual: good!
Then what need all this trifling woman's-work,
Letters and embassies and weak intrigue,
When will and power were mine to end at once

Safely and surely? Murder had come first
Not last with such a man, assure yourselves!
The silent *acquetta*, stilling at command —
A drop a day i' the wine or soup, the dose, —
The shattering beam that breaks above the bed
And beats out brains, with nobody to blame
Except the wormy age which eats even oak, —
Nay, the stanch steel or trusty cord, — who cares
I' the blind old palace, a pitfall at each step,
With none to see, much more to interpose
O' the two, three, creeping house-dog-servant-things
Born mine and bred mine? Had I willed gross death,
I had found nearer paths to thrust him prey
Than this that goes meandering here and there
Through half the world and calls down in its course
Notice and noise, — hate, vengeance, should it fail,
Derision and contempt though it succeed!
Moreover, what o' the future son and heir?
The unborn babe about to be called mine, —
What end in heaping all this shame on him,
Were I indifferent to my own black share?
Would I have tried these crookednesses, say,
Willing and able to effect the straight?"

"Ay, would you!" — one may hear the priest retort,
"Being as you are, i' the stock, a man of guile,
And ruffianism but an added graft.
You, a born coward, try a coward's arms,
Trick and chicane, — and only when these fail
Does violence follow, and like fox you bite
Caught out in stealing. Also, the disgrace
You hardly shrunk at, wholly shrivelled her:
You plunged her thin white delicate hand i' the flame
Along with your coarse horny brutish fist,
Held them a second there, then drew out both
— Yours roughed a little, hers ruined through and through
Your hurt would heal forthwith at ointment's touch —
Namely, succession to the inheritance
Which bolder crime had lost you: let things change,
The birth o' the boy warrant the bolder crime,
Why, murder was determined, dared and done.
For me," the priest proceeds with his reply,
"The look o' the thing, the chances of mistake,
All were against me, — that, I knew the first:
But, knowing also what my duty was,
I did it: I must look to men more skilled
In reading hearts than ever was the world."

Highness, decide! Pronounce, Her Excellency!
Or . . . even leave this argument in doubt,
Account it a fit matter, taken up
With all its faces, manifold enough,
To ponder on — what fronts us, the next stage,
Next legal process? Guido, in pursuit,
Coming up with the fugitives at the inn,
Caused both to be arrested then and there
And sent to Rome for judgment on the case —
Thither, with all his armory of proofs,
Betook himself: 't is there we 'll meet him now,
Waiting the further issue.

Here you smile:
"And never let him henceforth dare to plead —
Of all pleas and excuses in the world
For any deed hereafter to be done —
His irrepressible wrath at honor's wound!
Passion and madness irrepressible?
Why, Count and cavalier, the husband comes
And catches foe i' the very act of shame!
There 's man to man, — nature must have her way, —
We look he should have cleared things on the spot.
Yes, then, indeed — even though it prove he erred —
Though the ambiguous first appearance, mount
Of solid injury, melt soon to mist,
Still, — had he slain the lover and the wife —
Or, since she was a woman and his wife,
Slain him, but stript her naked to the skin,
Or at best left no more of an attire
Than patch sufficient to pin paper to,
Some one love-letter, infamy and all,
As passport to the Paphos fit for such,
Safe-conduct to her natural home the stews, —
Good! One had recognized the power o' the pulse.
But when he stands, the stock-fish, — sticks to law —
Offers the hole in his heart, all fresh and warm,
For scrivener's pen to poke and play about —
Can stand, can stare, can tell his beads perhaps,
Oh, let us hear no syllable o' the rage!
Such rage were a convenient afterthought
For one who would have shown his teeth belike,
Exhibited unbridled rage enough,
Had but the priest been found, as was to hope,
In serge, not silk, with crucifix, not sword:
Whereas the gray innocuous grub, of yore,
Had hatched a hornet, tickle to the touch,

The priest was metamorphosed into knight.
And even the timid wife, whose cue was — shriek,
Bury her brow beneath his trampling foot, —
She too sprang at him like a pythoness:
So, gulp down rage, passion must be postponed,
Calm be the word! Well, our word is — we brand
This part o' the business, howsoever the rest
Befall."

"Nay," interpose as prompt his friends —
"This is the world's way! So you adjudge reward
To the forbearance and legality
Yourselves begin by inculcating — ay,
Exacting from us all with knife at throat!
This one wrong more you add to wrong's amount, —
You publish all, with the kind comment here,
'Its victim was too cowardly for revenge.'"
Make it your own case, — you who stand apart!
The husband wakes one morn from heavy sleep,
With a taste of poppy in his mouth, — rubs eyes,
Finds his wife flown, his strong-box ransacked too,
Follows as he best can, overtakes i' the end.
You bid him use his privilege: well, it seems
He 's scarce cool-blooded enough for the right move —
Does not shoot when the game were sure, but stands
Bewildered at the critical minute, — since
He has the first flash of the fact alone
To judge from, act with, not the steady lights
Of after-knowledge, — yours who stand at ease
To try conclusions: he 's in smother and smoke,
You outside, with explosion at an end:
The sulphur may be lightning or a squib —
He 'll know in a minute, but till then, he doubts.
Back from what you know to what he knew not!
Hear the priest's lofty "I am innocent,"
The wife's as resolute "You are guilty!" Come!
Are you not staggered? — pause, and you lose the move!
Nought left you but a low appeal to law,
"Coward" tied to your tail for compliment!
Another consideration: have it your way!
Admit the worst: his courage failed the Count,
He 's cowardly like the best o' the burgesses
He 's grown incorporate with, — a very cur,
Kick him from out your circle by all means!
Why, trundled down this reputable stair,
Still, the church-door lies wide to take him in,
And the court-porch also: in he sneaks to each, —

"Yes, I have lost my honor and my wife,
And, being moreover an ignoble hound,
I dare not jeopardize my life for them!"
Religion and Law lean forward from their chairs,
"Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" Ay,
Not only applaud him that he scorned the world,
But punish should he dare do otherwise.
If the case be clear or turbid, — you must say!

Thus, anyhow, it mounted to the stage
In the law-courts, — let's see clearly from this point! —
Where the priest tells his story true or false,
And the wife her story, and the husband his,
All with result as happy as before.
The courts would nor condemn nor yet acquit
This, that or the other, in so distinct a sense
As end the strife to either's absolute loss:
Pronounced, in place of something definite,
"Each of the parties, whether goat or sheep
I' the main, has wool to show and hair to hide.
Each has brought somehow trouble, is somehow cause
Of pains enough, — even though no worse were proved.
Here is a husband, cannot rule his wife
Without provoking her to scream and scratch
And scour the fields, — causelessly, it may be:
Here is that wife, — who makes her sex our plague,
Wedlock, our bugbear, — perhaps with cause enough:
And here is the truant priest o' the trio, worst
Or best — each quality being conceivable.
Let us impose a little mulct on each.
We punish youth in state of pupilage
Who talk at hours when youth is bound to sleep,
Whether the prattle turn upon Saint Rose
Or Donna Olimpia of the Vatican:
'T is talk, talked wisely or unwisely talked,
I' the dormitory where to talk at all,
Transgresses, and is mulct: as here we mean.
For the wife, — let her betake herself, for rest,
After her run, to a House of Convertites —
Keep there, as good as real imprisonment:
Being sick and tired, she will recover so.
For the priest, spritely strayer out of bounds,
Who made Arezzo hot to hold him, — Rome
Profits by his withdrawal from the scene.
Let him be relegate to Civita,
Circumscribed by its bounds till matters mend:

There he at least lies out o' the way of harm
From foes — perhaps from the too friendly fair.
And finally for the husband, whose rash rule
Has but itself to blame for this ado, —
If he be vexed that, in our judgments dealt,
He fails obtain what he accounts his right,
Let him go comforted with the thought, no less,
That, turn each sentence howsoever he may,
There 's satisfaction to extract therefrom.
For, does he wish his wife proved innocent?
Well, she 's not guilty, he may safely urge,
Has missed the stripes dishonest wives endure —
This being a fatherly pat o' the cheek, no more.
Does he wish her guilty? Were she otherwise
Would she be locked up, set to say her prayers,
Prevented intercourse with the outside world,
And that suspected priest in banishment,
Whose portion is a further help i' the case?
Oh, ay, you all of you want the other thing,
The extreme of law, some verdict neat, complete, —
Either, the whole o' the dowry in your poke
With full release from the false wife, to boot,
And heading, hanging for the priest, beside —
Or, contrary, claim freedom for the wife,
Repayment of each penny paid her spouse,
Amends for the past, release for the future! Such
Is wisdom to the children of this world;
But we 've no mind, we children of the light,
To miss the advantage of the golden mean,
And push things to the steel point." Thus the courts.

Is it settled so far? Settled or disturbed,
Console yourselves: 't is like . . . an instance, now!
You 've seen the puppets, of Place Navona, play, —
Punch and his mate, — how threats pass, blows are dealt,
And a crisis comes: the crowd or clap or hiss
Accordingly as disposed for man or wife —
When down the actors duck awhile perdue,
Donning what novel rag-and-feather trim
Best suits the next adventure, new effect:
And, — by the time the mob is on the move,
With something like a judgment *pro* and *con*, —
There 's a whistle, up again the actors pop
In t' other tatter with fresh-tinselled staves,
To re-engage in one last worst fight more
Shall show, what you thought tragedy was farce.

Note, that the climax and the crown of things
Invariably is, the devil appears himself,
Armed and accoutred, horns and hoofs and tail!
Just so, nor otherwise it proved — you 'll see:
Move to the murder, never mind the rest!

Guido, at such a general duck-down,
I' the breathing-space, — of wife to convent here,
Priest to his relegation, and himself
To Arezzo, — had resigned his part perforce
To brother Abate, who bustled, did his best,
Retrieved things somewhat, managed the three suits —
Since, it should seem, there were three suits-at-law
Behoved him look to, still, lest bad grow worse:
First civil suit, — the one the parents brought,
Impugning the legitimacy of his wife,
Affirming thence the nullity of her rights:
This was before the Rota, — Molinès,
That 's judge there, made that notable decree
Which partly leaned to Guido, as I said, —
But Pietro had appealed against the same
To the very court will judge what we judge now —
Tommati and his fellows, — Suit the first.
Next civil suit, — demand on the wife's part
Of separation from the husband's bed
On plea of cruelty and risk to life —
Claims restitution of the dowry paid,
Immunity from paying any more:
This second, the Vicegerent has to judge.
Third and last suit, — this time, a criminal one, —
Answer to, and protection from, both these, —
Guido's complaint of guilt against his wife
In the Tribunal of the Governor,
Venturini, also judge of the present cause.
Three suits of all importance plaguing him,
Beside a little private enterprise
Of Guido's, — essay at a shorter cut.
For Paolo, knowing the right way at Rome,
Had, even while superintending these three suits
I' the regular way, each at its proper court,
Ingeniously made interest with the Pope
To set such tedious regular forms aside,
And, acting the supreme and ultimate judge,
Declare for the husband and against the wife.
Well, at such crisis and extreme of straits, —
The man at bay, buffeted in this wise, —

Happened the strangest accident of all.
"Then," sigh friends, "the last feather broke his back,
Made him forget all possible remedies
Save one — he rushed to, as the sole relief
From horror and the abominable thing."
"Or rather," laugh foes, "then did there befall
The luckiest of conceivable events,
Most pregnant with impunity for him,
Which henceforth turned the flank of all attack,
And bade him do his wickedest and worst."
— The wife's withdrawal from the Convertites,
Visit to the villa where her parents lived,
And birth there of his babe. Divergence here!
I simply take the facts, ask what they show.

First comes this thunderclap of a surprise:
Then follow all the signs and silences
Premonitory of earthquake. Paolo first
Vanished, was swept off somewhere, lost to Rome:
(Wells dry up, while the sky is sunny and blue.)
Then Guido girds himself for enterprise,
Hies to Vittiano, counsels with his steward,
Comes to terms with four peasants young and bold,
And starts for Rome the Holy, reaches her
At very holiest, for 't is Christmas Eve,
And makes straight for the Abate's dried-up font,
The lodge where Paolo ceased to work the pipes.
And then, rest taken, observation made
And plan completed, all in a grim week,
The five proceed in a body, reach the place,
— Pietro's, at the Paolina, silent, lone,
And stupefied by the propitious snow.
'T is one i' the evening: knock: a voice "Who 's there?"
"Friends with a letter from the priest your friend."
At the door, straight smiles old Violante's self.
She falls, — her son-in-law stabs through and through,
Reaches through her at Pietro — "With your son
This is the way to settle suits, good sire!"
He bellows "Mercy for heaven, not for earth!
Leave to confess and save my sinful soul,
Then do your pleasure on the body of me!"
—"Nay, father, soul with body must take its chance!"
He presently got his portion and lay still.
And last, Pompilia rushes here and there
Like a dove among the lightnings in her brake,
Falls also: Guido's, this last husband's-act.

He lifts her by the long dishevelled hair,
Holds her away at arm's length with one hand,
While the other tries if life come from the mouth —
Looks out his whole heart's hate on the shut eyes,
Draws a deep satisfied breath, " So — dead at last!"
Throws down the burden on dead Pietro's knees,
And ends all with " Let us away, my boys!"

And, as they left by one door, in at the other
Tumbled the neighbors — for the shrieks had pierced
To the mill and the grange, this cottage and that shed.
Soon followed the Public Force; pursuit began
Though Guido had the start and chose the road:
So, that same night was he, with the other four,
Overtaken near Baccano, — where they sank
By the wayside, in some shelter meant for beasts,
And now lay heaped together, nuzzling swine,
Each wrapped in bloody cloak, each grasping still
His unwiped weapon, sleeping all the same
The sleep o' the just, — a journey of twenty miles
Brought just and unjust to a level, you see.
The only one i' the world that suffered aught
By the whole night's toil and trouble, flight and chase,
Was just the officer who took them, Head
O' the Public Force, — Patrizj, zealous soul,
Who, having but duty to sustain weak flesh,
Got heated, caught a fever and so died:
A warning to the over-vigilant,
— Virtue in a chafe should change her linen quick,
Lest pleurisy get start of providence.
(That 's for the Cardinal, and told, I think!)

Well, they bring back the company to Rome.
Says Guido, " By your leave, I fain would ask
How you found out 't was I who did the deed?
What put you on my trace, a foreigner,
Supposed in Arezzo, — and assuredly safe
Except for an oversight: who told you, pray?"
"Why, naturally your wife!" Down Guido drops
O' the horse he rode, — they have to steady and stay,
At either side the brute that bore him, bound,
So strange it seemed his wife should live and speak!
She had prayed — at least so people tell you now —
For but one thing to the Virgin for herself,
Not simply, as did Pietro 'mid the stabs, —
Time to confess and get her own soul saved —

But time to make the truth apparent, truth
For God's sake, lest men should believe a lie:
Which seems to have been about the single prayer
She ever put up, that was granted her.
With this hope in her head, of telling truth, —
Being familiarized with pain, beside, —
She bore the stabbing to a certain pitch
Without a useless cry, was flung for dead
On Pietro's lap, and so attained her point.
Her friends subjoin this — have I done with them? —
And cite the miracle of continued life
(She was not dead when I arrived just now)
As attestation to her probity.

Does it strike your Excellency? Why, your Highness,
The self-command and even the final prayer,
Our candor must acknowledge explicable
As easily by the consciousness of guilt.
So, when they add that her confession runs
She was of wifehood one white innocence
In thought, word, act, from first of her short life
To last of it; praying, i' the face of death,
That God forgive her other sins — not this,
She is charged with and must die for, that she failed
Anyway to her husband: while thereon
Comments the old Religious — "So much good,
Patience beneath enormity of ill,
I hear to my confusion, woe is me,
Sinner that I stand, shamed in the walk and gait
I have practised and grown old in, by a child!" —
Guido's friends shrug the shoulder, "Just this same
Prodigious absolute calm in the last hour
Confirms us, — being the natural result
Of a life which proves consistent to the close.
Having braved heaven and deceived earth throughout,
She braves still and deceives still, gains thereby
Two ends, she prizes beyond earth or heaven:
First sets her lover free, imperilled sore
By the new turn things take: he answers yet
For the part he played: they have summoned him indeed
The past ripped up, he may be punished still:
What better way of saving him than this?
Then, — thus she dies revenged to the uttermost
On Guido, drags him with her in the dark,
The lower still the better, do you doubt?
Thus, two ways, does she love her love to the end,

And hate her hate, — death, hell is no such price
To pay for these, — lovers and haters hold."

But there 's another parry for the thrust.
"Confession," cry folks — "a confession, think!
Confession of the moribund is true!"
Which of them, my wise friends? This public one,
Or the private other we shall never know?
The private may contain — your casuists teach —
The acknowledgment of, and the penitence for,
That other public one, so people say.
However it be, — we trench on delicate ground,
Her Eminence is peeping o'er the cards, —
Can one find nothing in behalf of this
Catastrophe? Deaf folks accuse the dumb!
You criticise the drunken reel, fool's-speech,
Maniacal gesture of the man, — we grant!
But who poured poison in his cup, we ask?
Recall the list of his excessive wrongs,
First cheated in his wife, robbed by her kin,
Rendered anon the laughing-stock o' the world
By the story, true or false, of his wife's birth,—
The last seal publicly apposed to shame
By the open flight of wife and priest, — why, Sirs,
Step out of Rome a furlong, would you know
What anotherguess tribunal than ours here,
Mere worldly Court without the help of grace,
Thinks of just that one incident o' the flight?
Guido preferred the same complaint before
The court at Arezzo, bar of the Granduke, —
In virtue of it being Tuscany
Where the offence had rise and flight began, —
Selfsame complaint he made in the sequel here
Where the offence grew to the full, the flight
Ended: offence and flight, one fact judged twice
By two distinct tribunals, — what result?
There was a sentence passed at the same time
By Arezzo and confirmed by the Granduke,
Which nothing balks of swift and sure effect
But absence of the guilty, (flight to Rome
Frees them from Tuscan jurisdiction now)
— Condemns the wife to the opprobrious doom
Of all whom law just lets escape from death.
The Stinche, House of Punishment, for life, —
That 's what the wife deserves in Tuscany:
Here, she deserves — remitting with a smile

To her father's house, main object of the flight!
The thief presented with the thing he steals!

At this discrepancy of judgments — mad,
The man took on himself the office, judged;
And the only argument against the use
O' the law he thus took into his own hands
Is . . . what, I ask you? — that, revenging wrong,
He did not revenge sooner, kill at first
Whom he killed last! That is the final charge.
Sooner? What 's soon or late i' the case? — ask we.
A wound i' the flesh no doubt wants prompt redress;
It smarts a little to-day, well in a week,
Forgotten in a month; or never, or now, revenge!
But a wound to the soul? That rankles worse and worse.
Shall I comfort you, explaining — "Not this once
But now it may be some five hundred times
I called you ruffian, pandar, liar and rogue:
The injury must be less by lapse of time?"
The wrong is a wrong, one and immortal too,
And that you bore it those five hundred times,
Let it rankle unrevenged five hundred years,
Is just five hundred wrongs the more and worse!
Men, plagued this fashion, get to explode this way,
If left no other.

"But we left this man
Many another way, and there 's his fault,"
'T is answered — "He himself preferred our arm
O' the law to fight his battle with. No doubt
We did not open him an armory
To pick and choose from, use, and then reject.
He tries one weapon and fails, — he tries the next
And next: he flourishes wit and common sense,
They fail him, — he plies logic doughtily,
It fails him too, — thereon, discovers last
He has been blind to the combustibles —
That all the while he is aglow with ire,
Boiling with irrepressible rage, and so
May try explosives and discard cold steel, —
So hires assassins, plots, plans, executes!
Is this the honest self-forgetting rage
We are called to pardon? Does the furious bull
Pick out four help-mates from the grazing herd
And journey with them over hill and dale
Till he find his enemy?"

What rejoinder? save
That friends accept our bull-similitude.
Bull-like, — the indiscriminate slaughter, rude
And reckless aggravation of revenge,
Were all i' the way o' the brute who never once
Ceases, amid all provocation more,
To bear in mind the first tormentor, first
Giver o' the wound that goaded him to fight:
And, though a dozen follow and reinforce
The aggressor, wound in front and wound in flank,
Continues undisturbedly pursuit,
And only after prostrating his prize
Turns on the pettier, makes a general prey.
So Guido rushed against Violante, first
Author of all his wrongs, *fons et origo*
Malorum — drops first, deluge since, — which done,
He finished with the rest. Do you blame a bull?

In truth you look as puzzled as ere I preached!
How is that? There are difficulties perhaps
On any supposition, and either side.
Each party wants too much, claims sympathy
For its object of compassion, more than just.
Cry the wife's friends, "O the enormous crime
Caused by no provocation in the world!"
"Was not the wife a little weak?" — inquire —
"Punished extravagantly, if you please,
But meriting a little punishment?
One treated inconsiderately, say,
Rather than one deserving not at all
Treatment and discipline o' the harsher sort?"
No, they must have her purity itself,
Quite angel, — and her parents angels too
Of an aged sort, immaculate, word and deed:
At all events, so seeming, till the fiend,
Even Guido, by his folly, forced from them
The untoward avowal of the trick o' the birth,
Which otherwise were safe and secret now.
Why, here you have the awfullest of crimes
For nothing! Hell broke loose on a butterfly!
A dragon born of rose-dew and the moon!
Yet here is the monster! Why he 's a mere man —
Born, bred and brought up in the usual way.
His mother loves him, still his brothers stick
To the good fellow of the boyish games;
The Governor of his town knows and approves,

The Archbishop of the place knows and assists :
Here he has Cardinal This to vouch for the past,
Cardinal That to trust for the future, — match
And marriage were a Cardinal's making, — in short,
What if a tragedy be acted here
Impossible for malice to improve,
And innocent Guido with his innocent four
Be added, all five, to the guilty three,
That we of these last days be edified
With one full taste o' the justice of the world ?

The long and the short is, truth seems what I show : —
Undoubtedly no pains ought to be spared
To give the mob an inkling of our lights.
It seems unduly harsh to put the man
To the torture, as I hear the court intends,
Though readiest way of twisting out the truth ;
He is noble, and he may be innocent.
On the other hand, if they exempt the man
(As it is also said they hesitate
On the fair ground, presumptive guilt is weak
I' the case of nobility and privilege), —
What crime that ever was, ever will be,
Deserves the torture ? Then abolish it !
You see the reduction *ad absurdum*, Sirs ?

Her Excellency must pronounce, in fine !
What, she prefers going and joining play ?
Her Highness finds it late, intends retire ?
I am of their mind : only, all this talk talked,
'T was not for nothing that we talked, I hope ?
Both know as much about it, now, at least,
As all Rome : no particular thanks, I beg !
(You 'll see, I have not so advanced myself,
After my teaching the two idiots here !)

V.

COUNT GUIDO FRANCESCHINI.

Thanks, Sir, but, should it please the reverend Court,
I feel I can stand somehow, half sit down
Without help, make shift to even speak, you see,
Fortified by the sip of . . . why, 't is wine,
Velletri, — and not vinegar and gall,
So changed and good the times grow! Thanks, kind Sir!
Oh, but one sip 's enough! I want my head
To save my neck, there 's work awaits me still.
How cautious and considerate . . . aie, aie, aie,
Nor your fault, sweet Sir! Come, you take to heart
An ordinary matter. Law is law.
Noblemen were exempt, the vulgar thought,
From racking; but, since law thinks otherwise,
I have been put to the rack: all 's over now,
And neither wrist — what men style, out of joint:
If any harm be, 't is the shoulder-blade,
The left one, that seems wrong i' the socket, — Sirs,
Much could not happen, I was quick to faint,
Being past my prime of life, and out of health.
In short I thank you, — yes, and mean the word.
Needs must the Court be slow to understand
How this quite novel form of taking pain,
This getting tortured merely in the flesh,
Amounts to almost an agreeable change
In my case, me fastidious, plied too much
With opposite treatment, used (forgive the joke)
To the rasp-tooth toying with this brain of mine,
And, in and out my heart, the play o' the probe.
Four years have I been operated on
I' the soul, do you see — its tense or tremulous part —
My self-respect, my care for a good name,
Pride in an old one, love of kindred — just
A mother, brothers, sisters, and the like,
That looked up to my face when days were dim,
And fancied they found light there — no one spot,
Foppishly sensitive, but has paid its pang.

That, and not this you now oblige me with,
That was the Vigil-torment, if you please!
The poor old noble House that drew the rags
O' the Franceschini's once superb array
Close round her, hoped to slink unchallenged by,—
Pluck off these! Turn the drapery inside out
And teach the tittering town how scarlet wears!
Show men the lucklessness, the improvidence
Of the easy-natured Count before this Count,
The father I have some slight feeling for,
Who let the world slide, nor foresaw that friends
Then proud to cap and kiss their patron's shoe,
Would, when the purse he left held spider-webs,
Properly push his child to wall one day!
Mimic the tetchy humor, furtive glance,
And brow where half was furious, half fatigued,
O' the same son got to be of middle age,
Sour, saturnine,—your humble servant here,—
When things go cross and the young wife, he finds
Take to the window at a whistle's bid,
And yet demurs thereon, preposterous fool!—
Whereat the worthies judge he wants advice
And beg to civilly ask what's evil here,
Perhaps remonstrate on the habit they deem
He 's given unduly to, of beating her:
. . . Oh, sure he beats her—why says John so else,
Who is cousin to George who is sib to Tecla's self
Who cooks the meal and combs the lady's hair?
What! 'T is my wrist you merely dislocate
For the future when you mean me martyrdom?
—Let the old mother's economy alone,
How the brocade-strips saved o' the seamy side
O' the wedding-gown buy raiment for a year?
—How she can dress and dish up—lordly dish
Fit for a duke, lamb's head and purtenance—
With her proud hands, feast household so a week?
No word o' the wine rejoicing God and man,
The less when three-parts water? Then, I say,
A trifle of torture to the flesh, like yours,
While soul is spared such foretaste of hell-fire,
Is naught. But I curtail the catalogue
Through policy,—a rhetorician's trick,—
Because I would reserve some choicer points
O' the practice, more exactly parallel
(Having an eye to climax) with what gift,
Eventual grace the Court may have in store

I' the way of plague — what crown of punishments.
When I am hanged or headed, time enough
To prove the tenderness of only that,
Mere heading, hanging, — not their counterpart,
Not demonstration public and precise
That I, having married the mongrel of a drab,
Am bound to grant that mongrel-brat, my wife,
Her mother's birthright-license as is just, —
Let her sleep undisturbed, i' the family style,
Her sleep out in the embraces of a priest,
Nor disallow their bastard as my heir!
Your sole mistake, — dare I submit so much
To the reverend Court? — has been in all this pains
To make a stone roll down hill, — rack and wrench
And rend a man to pieces, all for what?
Why — make him ope mouth in his own defence,
Show cause for what he has done, the irregular deed,
(Since that he did it, scarce dispute can be)
And clear his fame a little, beside the luck
Of stopping even yet, if possible,
Discomfort to his flesh from noose or axe —
For that, out come the implements of law!
May it content my lords the gracious Court
To listen only half so patient-long
As I will in that sense profusely speak,
And — fie, they shall not call in screws to help!
I killed Pompilia Franceschini, Sirs;
Killed too the Comparini, husband, wife,
Who called themselves, by a notorious lie,
Her father and her mother to ruin me.
There 's the irregular deed: you want no more
Than right interpretation of the same,
And truth so far — am I to understand?
To that then, with convenient speed, — because
Now I consider, — yes, despite my boast,
There is an ailing in this omoplate
May clip my speech all too abruptly short,
Whatever the good-will in me. Now for truth!

I' the name of the indivisible Trinity!
Will my lords, in the plenitude of their light,
Weigh well that all this trouble has come on me
Through my persistent treading in the paths
Where I was trained to go, — wearing that yoke
My shoulder was predestined to receive,
Born to the hereditary stoop and crease?

Noble, I recognized my nobler still,
The Church, my suzerain; no mock-mistress, she;
The secular owned the spiritual: mates of mine
Have thrown their careless hoofs up at her call
"Forsake the clover and come drag my wain!"
There they go cropping: I protruded nose
To halter, bent my back of docile beast,
And now am whealed, one wide wound all of me,
For being found at the eleventh hour o' the day
Padding the mill-track, not neck-deep in grass:
— My one fault, I am stiffened by my work,
— My one reward, I help the Court to smile!

I am representative of a great line,
One of the first of the old families
In Arezzo, ancientest of Tuscan towns.
When my worst foe is fain to challenge this,
His worst exception runs — not first in rank
But second, noble in the next degree
Only; not malice' self maligns me more.
So, my lord opposite has composed, we know,
A marvel of a book, sustains the point
That Francis boasts the primacy 'mid saints;
Yet not inaptly hath his argument
Obtained response from yon my other lord
In thesis published with the world's applause
— Rather 't is Dominic such post befits:
Why, at the worst, Francis stays Francis still,
Second in rank to Dominic it may be,
Still, very saintly, very like our Lord;
And I at least descend from Guido once
Homager to the Empire, nought below —
Of which account as proof that, none o' the line
Having a single gift beyond brave blood,
Or able to do aught but give, give, give
In blood and brain, in house and land and cash,
Not get and garner as the vulgar may,
We became poor as Francis or our Lord.
Be that as it likes you, Sirs, — whenever it chanced
Myself grew capable anyway of remark,
(Which was soon — penury makes wit premature)
This struck me, I was poor who should be rich
Or pay that fault to the world which trifles not
When lineage lacks the flag yet lifts the pole:
On, therefore, I must move forthwith, transfer
My stranded self, born fish with gill and fin

Fit for the deep sea, now left flap bare-backed
In slush and sand, a show to crawlers vile
Reared of the low-tide and aright therein.
The enviable youth with the old name,
Wide chest, stout arms, sound brow and pricking veins,
A heartful of desire, man's natural load,
A brainful of belief, the noble's lot, —
All this life, cramped and gasping, high and dry
I' the wave's retreat, — the misery, good my lords,
Which made you merriment at Rome of late, —
It made me reason, rather — muse, demand
— Why our bare dropping palace, in the street
Where such-an-one whose grandfather sold tripe
Was adding to his purchased pile a fourth
Tall tower, could hardly show a turret sound?
Why Countess Beatrice, whose son I am,
Cowered in the winter-time as she spun flax,
Blew on the earthen basket of live ash,
Instead of jaunting forth in coach and six
Like such-another widow who ne'er was wed?
I asked my fellows, how came this about?
"Why, Jack, the sutler's child, perhaps the camp's,
Went to the wars, fought sturdily, took a town
And got rewarded as was natural.
She of the coach and six — excuse me there!
Why, don't you know the story of her friend?
A clown dressed vines on somebody's estate,
His boy recoiled from muck, liked Latin more,
Stuck to his pen and got to be a priest,
Till one day . . . don't you mind that telling tract
Against Molinos, the old Cardinal wrote?
He penned and dropped it in the patron's desk,
Who, deep in thought and absent much of mind,
Licensed the thing, allowed it for his own;
Quick came promotion, — *suum cuique*, Count!
Oh, he can pay for coach and six, be sure!"
"— Well, let me go, do likewise: war 's the word —
That way the Franceschini worked at first,
I'll take my turn, try soldiership." — "What, you?
The eldest son and heir and prop o' the house,
So do you see your duty? Here 's your post,
Hard by the hearth and altar. (Roam from roof,
This youngster, play the gypsy out of doors,
And who keeps kith and kin that fall on us?)
Stand fast, stick tight, conserve your gods at home!"
"— Well then, the quiet course, the contrary trade!

We had a cousin amongst us once was Pope,
And minor glories manifold. Try the Church,
The tonsure, and, — since heresy 's but half-slain
Even by the Cardinal's tract he thought he wrote, —
Have at Molinos!" — "Have at a fool's head!
You a priest? How were marriage possible?
There must be Franceschini till time ends —
That 's your vocation. Make your brothers priests,
Paul shall be porporate, and Girolamo step
Red-stockinged in the presence when you choose,
But save one Franceschini for the age!
Be not the vine but dig and dung its root,
Be not a priest but gird up priesthood's loins,
With one foot in Arezzo stride to Rome,
Spend yourself there and bring the purchase back!
Go hence to Rome, be guided!"

So I was.
I turned alike from the hillside zigzag thread
Of way to the table-land a soldier takes,
Alike from the low-lying pasture-place
Where churchmen graze, recline and ruminate,
— Ventured to mount no platform like my lords
Who judge the world, bear brain I dare not brag —
But stationed me, might thus the expression serve,
As who should fetch and carry, come and go,
Meddle and make i' the cause my lords love most —
The public weal, which hangs to the law, which holds
By the Church, which happens to be through God himself.
Humbly I helped the Church till here I stand, —
Or would stand but for the omoplate, you see!
Bidden qualify for Rome, I, having a field,
Went, sold it, laid the sum at Peter's foot:
Which means — I settled home-accounts with speed,
Set apart just a modicum should suffice
To hold the villa's head above the waves
Of weed inundating its oil and wine,
And prop roof, stanchion wall o' the palace so
As to keep breath i' the body, out of heart
Amid the advance of neighboring loftiness —
(People like building where they used to beg) —
Till succored one day, — shared the residue
Between my mother and brothers and sisters there,
Black-eyed babe Donna This and Donna That,
As near to starving as might decently be,
— Left myself journey-charges, change of suit,

A purse to put i' the pocket of the Groom
O' the Chamber of the patron, and a glove
With a ring to it for the digits of the niece
Sure to be helpful in his household, — then
Started for Rome, and led the life prescribed.
Close to the Church, though clean of it, I assumed
Three or four orders of no consequence,
— They cast out evil spirits and exorcise,
For example; bind a man to nothing more,
Give clerical savor to his layman's-salt,
Facilitate his claim to loaf and fish
Should miracle leave, beyond what feeds the flock,
Fragments to brim the basket of a friend —
While, for the world's sake, I rode, danced and gamed,
Quitted me like a courtier, measured mine
With whatsoever blade had fame in fence,
— Ready to let the basket go its round
Even though my turn was come to help myself,
Should Dives count on me at dinner-time
As just the understander of a joke
And not immoderate in repartee.
Utrique sic paratus, Sirs, I said,
"Here," (in the fortitude of years fifteen,
So good a pedagogue is penury)
"Here wait, do service, — serving and to serve!
And, in due time, I nowise doubt at all,
The recognition of my service comes.
Next year I 'm only sixteen. I can wait."

I waited thirty years, may it please the Court:
Saw meanwhile many a denizen o' the dung
Hop, skip, jump o'er my shoulder, make him wings
And fly aloft, — succeed, in the usual phrase.
Every one soon or late comes round by Rome:
Stand still here, you 'll see all in turn succeed.
Why, look you, so and so, the physician here,
My father's lacquey's son we sent to school,
Doctored and dosed this Eminence and that,
Salved the last Pope his certain obstinate sore,
Soon bought land as became him, names it now:
I grasp bell at his griffin-guarded gate,
Traverse the half-mile avenue, — a term,
A cypress, and a statue, three and three, —
Deliver message from my Monsignor,
With varletry at lounge i' the vestibule
I 'm barred from, who bear mud upon my shoe.

My father's chaplain's nephew, Chamberlain, —
Nothing less, please you! — courteous all the same,
— He does not see me though I wait an hour
At his staircase-landing 'twixt the brace of busts,
A noseless Sylla, Marius maimed to match,
My father gave him for a hexastich
Made on my birthday, — but he sends me down,
To make amends, that relic I prize most —
The unburnt end o' the very candle, Sirs,
Purfled with paint so prettily round and round,
He carried in such state last Peter's-day, —
In token I, his gentleman and squire,
Had held the bridle, walked his managed mule
Without a tittup the procession through.
Nay, the official, — one you know, sweet lords! —
Who drew the warrant for my transfer late
To the New Prisons from Tordinona, — he
Graciously had remembrance — "Francesc . . . ha?
His sire, now — how a thing shall come about! —
Paid me a dozen florins above the fee,
For drawing deftly up a deed of sale
When troubles fell so thick on him, good heart,
And I was prompt and pushing! By all means!
At the New Prisons be it his son shall lie, —
Anything for an old friend!" and thereat
Signed name with triple flourish underneath.
These were my fellows, such their fortunes now,
While I — kept fasts and feasts innumerable,
Matins and vespers, functions to no end
I' the train of Monsignor and Eminence,
As gentleman-squire, and for my zeal's reward
Have rarely missed a place at the table-foot
Except when some Ambassador, or such like,
Brought his own people. Brief, one day I felt
The tick of time inside me, turning-point
And slight sense there was now enough of this:
That I was near my seventh climacteric,
Hard upon, if not over, the middle life,
And, although fed by the east-wind, fulsome-fine
With foretaste of the Land of Promise, still
My gorge gave symptom it might play me false;
Better not press it further, — be content
With living and dying only a nobleman,
Who merely had a father great and rich,
Who simply had one greater and richer yet,
And so on back and back till first and best

Began i' the night; I finish in the day.
"The mother must be getting old," I said;
"The sisters are well wedded away, our name
Can manage to pass a sister off, at need,
And do for dowry: both my brothers thrive —
Regular priests they are, nor, bat-like, 'bide
'Twixt flesh and fowl with neither privilege.
My spare revenue must keep me and mine.
I am tired: Arezzo's air is good to breathe;
Vittiano, — one limes flocks of thrushes there;
A leathern coat costs little and lasts long:
Let me bid hope good-bye, content at home!"
Thus, one day, I disbosomed me and bowed.
Whereat began the little buzz and thrill
O' the gazers round me; each face brightened up:
As when at your Casino, deep in dawn,
A gamester says at last, "I play no more,
Forego gain, acquiesce in loss, withdraw
Anyhow:" and the watchers of his ways,
A trifle struck compunctious at the word,
Yet sensible of relief, breathe free once more,
Break up the ring, venture polite advice —
"How, Sir? So scant of heart and hope indeed?
Retire with neither cross nor pile from play? —
So incurious, so short-casting? — give your chance
To a younger, stronger, bolder spirit belike,
Just when luck turns and the fine throw sweeps all?"
Such was the chorus: and its goodwill meant —
"See that the loser leave door handsomely!
There 's an ill look, — it 's sinister, spoils sport,
When an old bruised and battered year-by-year
Fighter with fortune, not a penny in poke,
Reels down the steps of our establishment
And staggers on broad daylight and the world,
In shagrag beard and doleful doublet, drops
And breaks his heart on the outside: people prate
'Such is the profit of a trip upstairs!'
Contrive he sidle forth, balked of the blow
Best dealt by way of moral, bidding down
No curse but blessings rather on our heads
For some poor prize he bears at tattered breast,
Some palpable sort of kind of good to set
Over and against the grievance: give him quick!"
Whereon protested Paul, "Go hang yourselves!
Leave him to me. Count Guido and brother of mine,
A word in your ear! Take courage, since faint heart

Ne'er won . . . aha, fair lady, don't men say?
There 's a *sors*, there 's a right Virgilian dip!
Do you see the happiness o' the hint? At worst,
If the Church want no more of you, the Court
No more, and the Camp as little, the ingrates, — come,
Count you are counted: still you 've coat to back,
Not cloth of gold and tissue, as we hoped,
But cloth with sparks and spangles on its frieze
From Camp, Court, Church, enough to make a shine,
Entitle you to carry home a wife
With the proper dowry, let the worst betide!
Why, it was just a wife you meant to take!"

Now, Paul's advice was weighty: priests should know:
And Paul apprised me, ere the week was out,
That Pietro and Violante, the easy pair,
The cits enough, with stomach to be more,
Had just the daughter and exact the sum
To truck for the quality of myself: "She 's young,
Pretty and rich: you 're noble, classic, choice.
Is it to be a match?" — "A match," said I.
Done! He proposed all, I accepted all,
And we performed all. So I said and did
Simply. As simply followed, not at first,
But with the outbreak of misfortune, still
One comment on the saying and doing — "What?
No blush at the avowal you dared buy
A girl of age beseems your granddaughter,
Like ox or ass? Are flesh and blood a ware?
Are heart and soul a chattel?"
Softly, Sirs!
Will the Court of its charity teach poor me
Anxious to learn, of any way i' the world,
Allowed by custom and convenience, save
This same which, taught from my youth up, I trod?
Take me along with you; where was the wrong step?
If what I gave in barter, style and state
And all that hangs to Franceschinihood,
Were worthless, — why, society goes to ground,
Its rules are idiot's-rambling. Honor of birth, —
If that thing has no value, cannot buy
Something with value of another sort,
You 've no reward nor punishment to give
I' the giving or the taking honor; straight
Your social fabric, pinnacle to base,
Comes down a-clatter like a house of cards.

Get honor, and keep honor free from flaw,
Aim at still higher honor, — gabble o' the goose!
Go bid a second blockhead like myself
Spend fifty years in guarding bubbles of breath,
Soapsuds with air i' the belly, gilded brave,
Guarded and guided, all to break at touch
O' the first young girl's hand and first old fool's purse!
All my privation and endurance, all
Love, loyalty and labor dared and did,
Fiddle-de-dee! — why, doer and darer both, —
Count Guido Franceschini had hit the mark
Far better, spent his life with more effect,
As a dancer or a prizer, trades that pay!
On the other hand, bid this buffoonery cease,
Admit that honor is a privilege,
The question follows, privilege worth what?
Why, worth the market-price, — now up, now down,
Just so with this as with all other ware:
Therefore essay the market, sell your name,
Style and condition to who buys them best!
"Does my name purchase," had I dared inquire,
"Your niece, my lord?" there would have been rebuff
Though courtesy, your Lordship cannot else —
"Not altogether! Rank for rank may stand:
But I have wealth beside, you — poverty;
Your scale flies up there: bid a second bid,
Rank too and wealth too!" Reasoned like yourself!
But was it to you I went with goods to sell?
This time 't was my scale quietly kissed the ground,
Mere rank against mere wealth — some youth beside,
Some beauty too, thrown into the bargain, just
As the buyer likes or lets alone. I thought
To deal o' the square: others find fault, it seems:
The thing is, those my offer most concerned,
Pietro, Violante, cried they fair or foul?
What did they make o' the terms? Preposterous terms?
Why then accede so promptly, close with such
Nor take a minute to chaffer? Bargain struck,
They straight grew bilious, wished their money back,
Repented them, no doubt: why, so did I,
So did your Lordship, if town-talk be true,
Of paying a full farm's worth for that piece
By Pietro of Cortona — probably
His scholar Ciro Ferri may have retouched —
You caring more for color than design —
Getting a little tired of cupids too.

That 's incident to all the folk who buy!
I am charged, I know, with gilding fact by fraud;
I falsified and fabricated, wrote
Myself down roughly richer than I prove,
Rendered a wrong revenue, — grant it all!
Mere grace, mere coquetry such fraud, I say:
A flourish round the figures of a sum
For fashion's sake, that deceives nobody.
The veritable back-bone, understood
Essence of this same bargain, blank and bare,
Being the exchange of quality for wealth, —
What may such fancy-flights be? Flecks of oil
Flirted by chapmen where plain dealing grates.
I may have dripped a drop — "My name I sell;
Not but that I too boast my wealth" — as they,
'— We bring you riches; still our ancestor
Was hardly the rapscallion, folk saw flogged,
But heir to we know who, were rights of force!"
They knew and I knew where the back-bone lurked
I' the writhings of the bargain, lords, believe!
I paid down all engaged for, to a doit,
Delivered them just that which, their life long,
They hungered in the hearts of them to gain —
Incorporation with nobility thus
In word and deed: for that they gave me wealth.
But when they came to try their gain, my gift,
Quit Rome and qualify for Arezzo, take
The tone o' the new sphere that absorbed the old,
Put away gossip Jack and goody Joan
And go become familiar with the Great,
Greatness to touch and taste and handle now, —
Why, then, — they found that all was vanity,
Vexation, and what Solomon describes!
The old abundant city-fare was best,
The kindly warmth o' the commons, the glad clap
Of the equal on the shoulder, the frank grin
Of the underling at all so many spoons
Fire-new at neighborly treat, — best, best and best
Beyond compare! — down to the loll itself
O' the pot-house settle, — better such a bench
Than the stiff crucifixion by my dais
Under the piecemeal damask canopy
With the coroneted coat-of-arms a-top!
Poverty and privation for pride's sake,
All they engaged to easily brave and bear, —
With the fit upon them and their brains a-work, —

Proved unendurable to the sobered sots.
A banished prince, now, will exude a juice
And salamander-like support the flame:
He dines on chestnuts, chucks the husks to help
The broil o' the brazier, pays the due baioc,
Goes off light-hearted: his grimace begins
At the funny humors of the christening-feast
Of friend the money-lender, — then he 's touched
By the flame and frizzles at the babe to kiss!
Here was the converse trial, opposite mind:
Here did a petty nature split on rock
Of vulgar wants predestinate for such —
One dish at supper and weak wine to boot!
The prince had grinned and borne: the citizen shrieked,
Summoned the neighborhood to attest the wrong,
Made noisy protest he was murdered, — stoned
And burned and drowned and hanged, — then broke away,
He and his wife, to tell their Rome the rest.
And this you admire, you men o' the world, my lords?
This moves compassion, makes you doubt my faith?
Why, I appeal to . . . sun and moon? Not I!
Rather to Plautus, Terence, Boccaccio's Book,
My townsman, frank Ser Franco's merry Tales, —
To all who strip a vizard from a face,
A body from its padding, and a soul
From froth and ignorance it styles itself, —
If this be other than the daily hap
Of purblind greed that dog-like still drops bone,
Grasps shadow, and then howls the case is hard!

So much for them so far: now for myself,
My profit or loss i' the matter: married am I:
Text whereon friendly censors burst to preach.
Ay, at Rome even, long ere I was left
To regulate her life for my young bride
Alone at Arezzo, friendliness outbroke
(Sifting my future to predict its fault)
"Purchase and sale being thus so plain a point,
How of a certain soul bound up, maybe,
I' the barter with the body and money-bags?
From the bride's soul what is it you expect?"
Why, loyalty and obedience, — wish and will
To settle and suit her fresh and plastic mind
To the novel, not disadvantageous mould!
Father and mother shall the woman leave,
Cleave to the husband, be it for weal or woe:

There is the law: what sets this law aside
In my particular case? My friends submit
"Guide, guardian, benefactor, — fee, faw, fum,
The fact is you are forty-five years old,
Nor very comely even for that age:
Girls must have boys." Why, let girls say so then,
Nor call the boys and men, who say the same,
Brute this and beast the other as they do!
Come, cards on table! When you chant us next
Epithalamium full to overflow
With praise and glory of white womanhood,
The chaste and pure — troll no such lies o'er lip!
Put in their stead a crudity or two,
Such short and simple statement of the case
As youth chalks on our walls at spring of year!
No! I shall still think nobler of the sex,
Believe a woman still may take a man
For the short period that his soul wears flesh,
And, for the soul's sake, understand the fault
Of armor frayed by fighting. Tush, it tempts
One's tongue too much! I'll say — the law 's the law:
With a wife I look to find all wifeliness,
As when I buy, timber and twig, a tree —
I buy the song o' the nightingale inside.

Such was the pact: Pompilia from the first
Broke it, refused from the beginning day
Either in body or soul to cleave to mine,
And published it forthwith to all the world.
No rupture, — you must join ere you can break, —
Before we had cohabited a month
She found I was a devil and no man, —
Made common cause with those who found as much,
Her parents, Pietro and Violante, — moved
Heaven and earth to the rescue of all three.
In four months' time, the time o' the parents' stay,
Arezzo was a-ringing, bells in a blaze,
With the unimaginable story rife
I' the mouth of man, woman and child — to wit
My misdemeanor. First the lighter side,
Ludicrous face of things, — how very poor
The Franceschini had become at last,
The meanness and the misery of each shift
To save a soldo, stretch and make ends meet.
Next, the more hateful aspect, — how myself
With cruelty beyond Caligula's

Had stripped and beaten, robbed and murdered them,
The good old couple, I decoyed, abused,
Plundered and then cast out, and happily so,
Since, — in due course the abominable comes, —
Woe worth the poor young wife left lonely here!
Repugnant in my person as my mind,
I sought, — was ever heard of such revenge?
— To lure and bind her to so cursed a couch,
Such co-embrace with sulphur, snake and toad,
That she was fain to rush forth, call the stones
O' the common street to save her, not from hate
Of mine merely, but . . . must I burn my lips
With the blister of the lie? . . . the satyr-love
Of who but my own brother, the young priest,
Too long enforced to lenten fare belike,
Now tempted by the morsel tossed him full
I' the trencher where lay bread and herbs at best.
Mark, this yourselves say! — this, none disallows,
Was charged to me by the universal voice
At the instigation of my four-months' wife! —
And then you ask, "Such charges so preferred,
(Truly or falsely, here concerns us not)
Pricked you to punish now if not before? —
Did not the harshness double itself, the hate
Harden?" I answer, "Have it your way and will!"
Say my resentment grew apace: what then?
Do you cry out on the marvel? When I find
That pure smooth egg which, laid within my nest,
Could not but hatch a comfort to us all,
Issues a cockatrice for me and mine,
Do you stare to see me stamp on it? Swans are soft:
Is it not clear that she you call my wife,
That any wife of any husband, caught
Whetting a sting like this against his breast, —
Speckled with fragments of the fresh-broke shell,
Married a month and making outcry thus, —
Proves a plague-prodigy to God and man?
She married: what was it she married for,
Counted upon and meant to meet thereby?
"Love," suggests some one, "love, a little word
Whereof we have not heard one syllable."
So, the Pompilia, child, girl, wife, in one,
Wanted the beating pulse, the rolling eye,
The frantic gesture, the devotion due
From Thyrsis to Neæra! Guido's love —
Why not Provençal roses in his shoe,

Plume to his cap, and trio of guitars
At casement, with a bravo close beside?
Good things all these are, clearly claimable
When the fit price is paid the proper way.
Had it been some friend's wife, now, threw her fan
At my foot, with just this pretty scrap attached,
"Shame, death, damnation — fall these as they may,
So I find you, for a minute! Come this eve!"
— Why, at such sweet self-sacrifice, — who knows?
I might have fired up, found me at my post,
Ardent from head to heel, nor feared catch cough.
Nay, had some other friend's . . . say, daughter, tripped
Upstairs and tumbled flat and frank on me,
Bareheaded and barefooted, with loose hair
And garments all at large, — cried "Take me thus!
Duke So-and-So, the greatest man in Rome —
To escape his hand and heart have I broke bounds,
Traversed the town and reached you!" — Then, indeed,
The lady had not reached a man of ice!
I would have rummaged, ransacked at the word
Those old odd corners of an empty heart
For remnants of dim love the long disused,
And dusty crumblings of romance! But here,
We talk of just a marriage, if you please —
The every-day conditions and no more;
Where do these bind me to bestow one drop
Of blood shall dye my wife's true-love-knot pink?
Pompilia was no pigeon, Venus' pet,
That shuffled from between her pressing paps
To sit on my rough shoulder, — but a hawk,
I bought at a hawk's price and carried home
To do hawk's service — at the Rotunda, say,
Where, six o' the callow nestlings in a row,
You pick and choose and pay the price for such.
I have paid my pound, await my penny's worth,
So, hoodwink, starve and properly train my bird,
And, should she prove a haggard, — twist her neck!
Did I not pay my name and style, my hope
And trust, my all? Through spending these amiss
I am here! 'T is scarce the gravity of the Court
Will blame me that I never piped a tune,
Treated my falcon-gentle like my finch.
The obligation I incurred was just
To practise mastery, prove my mastership: —
Pompilia's duty was — submit herself,
Afford me pleasure, perhaps cure my bile.

Am I to teach my lords what marriage means,
What God ordains thereby and man fulfils
Who, docile to the dictate, treads the house?
My lords have chosen the happier part with Paul
And neither marry nor burn, — yet priestliness
Can find a parallel to the marriage-bond
In its own blessed special ordinance
Whereof indeed was marriage made the type:
The Church may show her insubordinate,
As marriage her refractory. How of the Monk
Who finds the claustral regimen too sharp
After the first month's essay? What 's the mode
With the Deacon who supports indifferently
The rod o' the Bishop when he tastes its smart
Full four weeks? Do you straightway slacken hold
Of the innocents, the all-unwary ones
Who, eager to profess, mistook their mind? —
Remit a fast-day's rigor to the Monk
Who fancied Francis' manna meant roast quails, —
Concede the Deacon sweet society,
He never thought the Levite-rule renounced, —
Or rather prescribe short chain and sharp scourge
Corrective of such peccant humors? This —
I take to be the Church's mode, and mine.
If I was over-harsh, — the worse i' the wife
Who did not win from harshness as she ought,
Wanted the patience and persuasion, lore
Of love, should cure me and console herself.
Put case that I mishandle, flurry and fright
My hawk through clumsiness in sportsmanship,
Twitch out five pens where plucking one would serve —
What, shall she bite and claw to mend the case?
And, if you find I pluck five more for that,
Shall you weep "How he roughs the turtle there"?

Such was the starting; now of the further step.
In lieu of taking penance in good part,
The Monk, with hue and cry, summons a mob
To make a bonfire of the convent, say, —
And the Deacon's pretty piece of virtue (save
The ears o' the Court! I try to save my head)
Instructed by the ingenuous postulant,
Taxes the Bishop with adultery, (mud
Needs must pair off with mud, and filth with filth) —
Such being my next experience. Who knows not —
The couple, father and mother of my wife,

Returned to Rome, published before my lords,
Put into print, made circulate far and wide
That they had cheated me who cheated them?
Pompilia, I supposed their daughter, drew
Breath first 'mid Rome's worst rankness, through the deed
Of a drab and a rogue, was by-blow bastard-babe
Of a nameless strumpet, passed off, palmed on me
As the daughter with the dowry. Daughter? Dirt
O' the kennel! Dowry? Dust o' the street! Nought more
Nought less, nought else but — oh — ah — assuredly
A Franceschini and my very wife!
Now take this charge as you will, for false or true, —
This charge, preferred before your very selves
Who judge me now, — I pray you, adjudge again,
Classing it with the cheats or with the lies,
By which category I suffer most!
But of their reckoning, theirs who dealt with me
In either fashion, — I reserve my word,
Justify that in its place; I am now to say,
Whichever point o' the charge might poison most,
Pompilia's duty was no doubtful one.
You put the protestation in her mouth,
"Henceforward and forevermore, avaunt
Ye fiends, who drop disguise and glare revealed
In your own shape, no longer father mine
Nor mother mine! Too nakedly you hate
Me whom you looked as if you loved once, — me
Whom, whether true or false, your tale now damns,
Divulged thus to my public infamy,
Private perdition, absolute overthrow.
For, hate my husband to your hearts' content,
I, spoil and prey of you from first to last,
I who have done you the blind service, lured
The lion to your pitfall, — I, thus left
To answer for my ignorant bleating there,
I should have been remembered and withdrawn
From the first o' the natural fury, not flung loose
A proverb and a byword men will mouth
At the cross-way, in the corner, up and down
Rome and Arezzo, — there, full in my face,
If my lord, missing them and finding me,
Content himself with casting his reproach
To drop i' the street where such impostors die.
Ah, but — that husband, what the wonder were! —
If, far from casting thus away the rag
Smeared with the plague, his hand had chanced upon,

Sewn to his pillow by Locusta's wile, —
Far from abolishing, root, stem and branch,
The misgrowth of infectious mistletoe
Foisted into his stock for honest graft, —
If he repudiate not, renounce nowise,
But, guarding, guiding me, maintain my cause
By making it his own, (what other way?)
— To keep my name for me, he call it his,
Claim it of who would take it by their lie, —
To save my wealth for me — or babe of mine
Their lie was framed to beggar at the birth —
He bid them loose grasp, give our gold again:
If he become no partner with the pair
Even in a game which, played adroitly, gives
Its winner life's great wonderful new chance, —
Of marrying, to wit, a second time, —
Ah, if he did thus, what a friend were he!
Anger he might show, — who can stamp out flame
Yet spread no black o' the brand? — yet, rough albeit
In the act, as whose bare feet feel embers scorch,
What grace were his, what gratitude were mine!"
Such protestation should have been my wife's.
Looking for this, do I exact too much?
Why, here 's the — word for word so much, no more —
Avowal she made, her pure spontaneous speech
To my brother the Abate at first blush,
Ere the good impulse had begun to fade:
So did she make confession for the pair,
So pour forth praises in her own behalf.
"Ay, the false letter," interpose my lords —
"The simulated writing, — 't was a trick:
You traced the signs, she merely marked the same,
The product was not hers but yours." Alack,
I want no more impulsion to tell truth
From the other trick, the torture inside there!
I confess all — let it be understood —
And deny nothing! If I baffle you so,
Can so fence, in the plenitude of right,
That my poor lathen dagger puts aside
Each pass o' the Bilboa, beats you all the same, —
What matters inefficiency of blade?
Mine and not hers the letter, — conceded, lords!
Impute to me that practice! — take as proved
I taught my wife her duty, made her see
What it behoved her see and say and do,
Feel in her heart and with her tongue declare,

And, whether sluggish or recalcitrant,
Forced her to take the right step, I myself
Was marching in marital rectitude!
Why, who finds fault here, say the tale be true?
Would not my lords commend the priest whose zeal
Seized on the sick, morose or moribund,
By the palsy-smitten finger, made it cross
His brow correctly at the critical time?
— Or answered for the inarticulate babe
At baptism, in its stead declared the faith,
And saved what else would perish unprofessed?
True, the incapable hand may rally yet,
Renounce the sign with renovated strength, —
The babe may grow up man and Molinist, —
And so Pompilia, set in the good path
And left to go alone there, soon might see
That too frank-forward, all too simple-strait
Her step was, and decline to tread the rough,
When here lay, tempting foot, the meadow-side,
And there the coppice rang with singing-birds!
Soon she discovered she was young and fair,
That many in Arezzo knew as much, —
Yes, this next cup of bitterness, my lords,
Had to begin go filling, drop by drop,
Its measure up of full disgust for me,
Filtered into by every noisome drain —
Society's sink toward which all moisture runs.
Would not you prophesy — "She on whose brow is stamped
The note of the imputation that we know, —
Rightly or wrongly mothered with a whore, —
Such an one, to disprove the frightful charge,
What will she but exaggerate chastity,
Err in excess of wifehood, as it were,
Renounce even levities permitted youth,
Though not youth struck to age by a thunderbolt?
Cry 'wolf' i' the sheepfold, where 's the sheep dares bleat,
Knowing the shepherd listens for a growl?"
So you expect. How did the devil decree?
Why, my lords, just the contrary of course!
It was in the house from the window, at the church
From the hassock, — where the theatre lent its lodge,
Or staging for the public show left space, —
That still Pompilia needs must find herself
Launching her looks forth, letting looks reply
As arrows to a challenge; on all sides
Ever new contribution to her lap,

Till one day, what is it knocks at my clenched teeth
But the cup full, curse-collected all for me?
And I must needs drink, drink this gallant's praise,
That minion's prayer, the other fop's reproach,
And come at the dregs to — Caponsacchi! Sirs,
I, — chin deep in a marsh of misery,
Struggling to extricate my name and fame
And fortune from the marsh would drown them all,
My face the sole unstrangled part of me, —
I must have this new gad-fly in that face,
Must free me from the attacking lover too!
Men say I battled ungracefully enough —
Was harsh, uncouth and ludicrous beyond
The proper part o' the husband: have it so!
Your lordships are considerate at least —
You order me to speak in my defence
Plainly, expect no quavering tuneful trills
As when you bid a singer solace you, —
Nor look that I shall give it, for a grace,
Stans pede in uno: — you remember well
In the one case, 't is a plainsong too severe,
This story of my wrongs, — and that I ache
And need a chair, in the other. Ask you me
Why, when I felt this trouble flap my face,
Already pricked with every shame could perch, —
When, with her parents, my wife plagued me too, —
Why I enforced not exhortation mild
To leave whore's-tricks and let my brows alone,
With mulct of comfits, promise of perfume?

"Far from that! No, you took the opposite course,
Breathed threatenings, rage and slaughter!" What you will!
And the end has come, the doom is verily here,
Unhindered by the threatening. See fate's flare
Full on each face of the dead guilty three!
Look at them well, and now, lords, look at this!
Tell me: if on that day when I found first
That Caponsacchi thought the nearest way
To his church was some half-mile round by my door,
And that he so admired, shall I suppose,
The manner of the swallows' come-and-go
Between the props o' the window overhead, —
That window happening to be my wife's, —
As to stand gazing by the hour on high,
Of May-eves, while she sat and let him smile, —
If I, — instead of threatening, talking big,

Showing hair-powder, a prodigious pinch,
For poison in a bottle, — making believe
At desperate doings with a bauble-sword,
And other bugaboo-and-baby-work, —
Had, with the vulgarest household implement,
Calmly and quietly cut off, clean through bone,
But one joint of one finger of my wife,
Saying, "For listening to the serenade,
Here 's your ring-finger shorter a full third:
Be certain I will slice away next joint,
Next time that anybody underneath
Seems somehow to be sauntering as he hoped
A flower would eddy out of your hand to his,
While you please fidget with the branch above
O' the rose-tree in the terrace!" — had I done so,
Why, there had followed a quick sharp scream, some pain,
Much calling for plaister, damage to the dress,
A somewhat sulky countenance next day,
Perhaps reproaches, — but reflections too!
I don't hear much of harm that Malchus did
After the incident of the ear, my lords!
Saint Peter took the efficacious way;
Malchus was sore but silenced for his life:
He did not hang himself i' the Potter's Field
Like Judas, who was trusted with the bag
And treated to sops after he proved a thief.
So, by this time, my true and obedient wife
Might have been telling beads with a gloved hand;
Awkward a little at pricking hearts and darts
On sampler possibly, but well otherwise:
Not where Rome shudders now to see her lie.
I give that for the course a wise man takes;
I took the other however, tried the fool's,
The lighter remedy, brandished rapier dread
With cork-ball at the tip, boxed Malchus' ear
Instead of severing the cartilage,
Called her a terrible nickname, and the like,
And there an end: and what was the end of that?
What was the good effect o' the gentle course?
Why, one night I went drowsily to bed,
Dropped asleep suddenly, not suddenly woke,
But did wake with rough rousing and loud cry,
To find noon in my face, a crowd in my room,
Fumes in my brain, fire in my throat, my wife
Gone God knows whither, — rifled vesture-chest,
And ransacked money-coffer. "What does it mean?"

The servants had been drugged too, stared and yawned
'It must be that our lady has eloped!"
—"Whither and with whom?"—"With whom but the
    Canon's self?
One recognizes Caponsacchi there!"—
(By this time the admiring neighborhood
Joined chorus round me while I rubbed my eyes)
'T is months since their intelligence began,—
A comedy the town was privy to,—
He wrote and she wrote, she spoke, he replied,
And going in and out your house last night
Was easy work for one . . . to be plain with you . . .
Accustomed to do both, at dusk and dawn
When you were absent,—at the villa, you know,
Where husbandry required the master-mind.
Did not you know? Why, we all knew, you see!"
And presently, bit by bit, the full and true
Particulars of the tale were volunteered
With all the breathless zeal of friendship—"Thus
Matters were managed: at the seventh hour of night" . . .
—"Later, at daybreak" . . . "Caponsacchi came" . . .
—"While you and all your household slept like death,
Drugged as your supper was with drowsy stuff" . . .
—"And your own cousin Guillichini too—
Either or both entered your dwelling-place,
Plundered it at their pleasure, made prize of all,
Including your wife" . . .—"Oh, your wife led the way,
Out of doors, on to the gate" . . .—"But gates are shut,
In a decent town, to darkness and such deeds:
They climbed the wall—your lady must be lithe—
At the gap, the broken bit" . . .—"Torrione, true!
To escape the questioning guard at the proper gate,
Clemente, where at the inn, hard by, 'the Horse,'
Just outside, a calash in readiness
Took the two principals, all alone at last,
To gate San Spirito, which o'erlooks the road,
Leads to Perugia, Rome and liberty."
Bit by bit thus made-up mosaic-wise,
Flat lay my fortune,—tessellated floor,
Imperishable tracery devils should foot
And frolic it on, around my broken gods,
Over my desecrated hearth.
                                        So much
For the terrible effect of threatening, Sirs!

Well, this way I was shaken wide awake,
Doctored and drenched, somewhat unpoisoned so.

Then, set on horseback and bid seek the lost,
I started alone, head of me, heart of me
Fire, and each limb as languid . . . ah, sweet lords,
Bethink you! — poison-torture, try persuade
The next refractory Molinist with that! . . .
Floundered through day and night, another day
And yet another night, and so at last,
As Lucifer kept falling to find hell,
Tumbled into the court-yard of an inn
At the end, and fell on whom I thought to find,
Even Caponsacchi, — what part once was priest,
Cast to the winds now with the cassock-rags:
In cape and sword a cavalier confessed,
There stood he chiding dilatory grooms,
Chafing that only horseflesh and no team
Of eagles would supply the last relay,
Whirl him along the league, the one post more
Between the couple and Rome and liberty.
'T was dawn, the couple were rested in a sort,
And though the lady, tired, — the tenderer sex, —
Still lingered in her chamber, — to adjust
The limp hair, look for any blush astray, —
She would descend in a twinkling, — "Have you out
The horses therefore!"

So did I find my wife.

Is the case complete? Do your eyes here see with mine?
Even the parties dared deny no one
Point out of all these points.

What follows next?

"Why, that then was the time," you interpose,
"Or then or never, while the fact was fresh,
To take the natural vengeance: there and thus
They and you, — somebody had stuck a sword
Beside you while he pushed you on your horse, —
'T was requisite to slay the couple, Count!"
Just so my friends say — "Kill!" they cry in a breath,
Who presently, when matters grow to a head
And I do kill the offending ones indeed, —
When crime of theirs, only surmised before,
Is patent, proved indisputably now, —
When remedy for wrong, untried at the time,
Which law professes shall not fail a friend,
Is thrice tried now, found threefold worse than null, —
When what might turn to transient shade, who knows?
Solidifies into a blot which breaks
Hell's black off in pale flakes for fear of mine, —

Then, when I claim and take revenge — "So rash?"
They cry — "so little reverence for the law?"

Listen, my masters, and distinguish here!
At first, I called in law to act and help:
Seeing I did so, "Why, 't is clear," they cry,
"You shrank from gallant readiness and risk,
Were coward: the thing 's inexplicable else."
Sweet my lords, let the thing be! I fall flat,
Play the reed, not the oak, to breath of man.
Only, inform my ignorance! Say I stand
Convicted of the having been afraid,
Proved a poltroon, no lion but a lamb, —
Does that deprive me of my right of lamb
And give my fleece and flesh to the first wolf?
Are eunuchs, women, children, shieldless quite
Against attack their own timidity tempts?
Cowardice were misfortune and no crime!
— Take it that way, since I am fallen so low
I scarce dare brush the fly that blows my face,
And thank the man who simply spits not there, —
Unless the Court be generous, comprehend
How one brought up at the very feet of law
As I, awaits the grave Gamaliel's nod
Ere he clench fist at outrage, — much less, stab!
— How, ready enough to rise at the right time,
I still could recognize no time mature
Unsanctioned by a move o' the judgment-seat,
So, mute in misery, eyed my masters here
Motionless till the authoritative word
Pronounced amercement. There 's the riddle solved:
This is just why I slew nor her nor him,
But called in law, law's delegate in the place,
And bade arrest the guilty couple, Sirs!
We had some trouble to do so — you have heard
They braved me, — he with arrogance and scorn,
She, with a volubility of curse,
A conversancy in the skill of tooth
And claw to make suspicion seem absurd,
Nay, an alacrity to put to proof
At my own throat my own sword, teach me so
To try conclusions better the next time, —
Which did the proper service with the mob.
They never tried to put on mask at all:
Two avowed lovers forcibly torn apart,
Upbraid the tyrant as in a playhouse scene,

Ay, and with proper clapping and applause
From the audience that enjoys the bold and free.
I kept still, said to myself, "There 's law!" Anon
We searched the chamber where they passed the night,
Found what confirmed the worst was feared before,
However needless confirmation now —
The witches' circle intact, charms undisturbed
That raised the spirit and succubus, — letters, to wit,
Love-laden, each the bag o' the bee that bore
Honey from lily and rose to Cupid's hive, —
Now, poetry in some rank blossom-burst,
Now, prose, — "Come here, go there, wait such a while,
He 's at the villa, now he 's back again:
We are saved, we are lost, we are lovers all the same!"
All in order, all complete, — even to a clue
To the drowsiness that happed so opportune —
No mystery, when I read, "Of all things, find
What wine Sir Jealousy decides to drink —
Red wine? Because a sleeping-potion, dust
Dropped into white, discolors wine and shows."

— "Oh, but we did not write a single word!
Somebody forged the letters in our name! — "
Both in a breath protested presently.
Aha, Sacchetti again! — "Dame," — quoth the Duke,
"What meaneth this epistle, counsel me,
I pick from out thy placket and peruse,
Wherein my page averreth thou art white
And warm and wonderful 'twixt pap and pap?"
"Sir," laughed the Lady, "'t is a counterfeit!
Thy page did never stroke but Dian's breast,
The pretty hound I nurture for thy sake:
To lie were losel, — by my fay, no more!"
And no more say I too, and spare the Court.

Ah, the Court! yes, I come to the Court's self;
Such the case, so complete in fact and proof,
I laid at the feet of law, — there sat my lords,
Here sit they now, so may they ever sit
In easier attitude than suits my haunch!
In this same chamber did I bare my sores
O' the soul and not the body, — shun no shame,
Shrink from no probing of the ulcerous part,
Since confident in Nature, — which is God, —
That she who, for wise ends, concocts a plague,
Curbs, at the right time, the plague's virulence too:

Law renovates even Lazarus, — cures me!
Cæsar thou seekest? To Cæsar thou shalt go!
Cæsar's at Rome: to Rome accordingly!

The case was soon decided: both weights, cast
I' the balance, vibrate, neither kicks the beam,
Here away, there away, this now and now that.
To every one o' my grievances law gave
Redress, could purblind eye but see the point.
The wife stood a convicted runagate
From house and husband, — driven to such a course
By what she somehow took for cruelty,
Oppression and imperilment of life —
Not that such things were, but that so they seemed:
Therefore, the end conceded lawful, (since
To save life there's no risk should stay our leap)
It follows that all means to the lawful end
Are lawful likewise, — poison, theft and flight.
As for the priest's part, did he meddle or make,
Enough that he too thought life jeopardized;
Concede him then the color charity
Casts on a doubtful course, — if blackish white
Or whitish black, will charity hesitate?
What did he else but act the precept out,
Leave, like a provident shepherd, his safe flock
To follow the single lamb and strayaway?
Best hope so and think so, — that the ticklish time
I' the carriage, the tempting privacy, the last
Somewhat ambiguous accident at the inn,
— All may bear explanation: may? then, must!
The letters, — do they so incriminate?
But what if the whole prove a prank o' the pen,
Flight of the fancy, none of theirs at all,
Bred of the vapors of my brain belike,
Or at worst mere exercise of scholar's-wit
In the courtly Caponsacchi: verse, convict?
Did not Catullus write less seemly once?
Yet *doctus* and unblemished he abides.
Wherefore so ready to infer the worst?
Still, I did righteously in bringing doubts
For the law to solve, — take the solution now!
"Seeing that the said associates, wife and priest,
Bear themselves not without some touch of blame
— Else why the pother, scandal and outcry
Which trouble our peace and require chastisement?
We, for complicity in Pompilia's flight

And deviation, and carnal intercourse
With the same, do set aside and relegate
The Canon Caponsacchi for three years
At Civita in the neighborhood of Rome:
And we consign Pompilia to the care
Of a certain Sisterhood of penitents
I' the city's self, expert to deal with such."
Word for word, there 's your judgment! Read it, lords,
Re-utter your deliberate penalty
For the crime yourselves establish! Your award —
Who chop a man's right-hand off at the wrist
For tracing with forefinger words in wine
O' the table of a drinking-booth that bear
Interpretation as they mocked the Church!
— Who brand a woman black between the breasts
For sinning by connection with a Jew:
While for the Jew's self — pudency be dumb! —
You mete out punishment such and such, yet so
Punish the adultery of wife and priest!
Take note of that, before the Molinists do,
And read me right the riddle, since right must be!
While I stood rapt away with wonderment,
Voices broke in upon my mood and muse.
"Do you sleep?" began the friends at either ear,
"The case is settled, — you willed it should be so —
None of our counsel, always recollect!
With law's award, budge! Back into your place!
Your betters shall arrange the rest for you.
We 'll enter a new action, claim divorce:
Your marriage was a cheat themselves allow:
You erred i' the person, — might have married thus
Your sister or your daughter unaware.
We 'll gain you, that way, liberty at least,
Sure of so much by law's own showing. Up
And off with you and your unluckiness —
Leave us to bury the blunder, sweep things smooth!"
I was in humble frame of mind, be sure!
I bowed, betook me to my place again.
Station by station I retraced the road,
Touched at this hostel, passed this post-house by,
Where, fresh-remembered yet, the fugitives
Had risen to the heroic stature: still —
"That was the bench they sat on, — there 's the board
They took the meal at, — yonder garden-ground
They leaned across the gate of," — ever a word
O' the Helen and the Paris, with "Ha! you 're he,

The . . . much-commiserated husband?" Step
By step, across the pelting, did I reach
Arezzo, underwent the archway's grin,
Traversed the length of sarcasm in the street,
Found myself in my horrible house once more,
And after a colloquy . . . no word assists!
With the mother and the brothers, stiffened me
Straight out from head to foot as dead man does,
And, thus prepared for life as he for hell,
Marched to the public Square and met the world.
Apologize for the pincers, palliate screws?
Ply me with such toy-trifles, I entreat!
Trust who has tried both sulphur and sops-in-wine!

I played the man as I best might, bade friends
Put non-essentials by and face the fact.
"What need to hang myself as you advise?
The paramour is banished, — the ocean's width,
Or the suburb's length, — to Ultima Thule, say,
Or Proxima Civitas, what 's the odds of name
And place? He 's banished, and the fact 's the thing.
Why should law banish innocence an inch?
Here 's guilt then, what else do I care to know?
The adulteress lies imprisoned, — whether in a well
With bricks above and a snake for company,
Or tied by a garter to a bedpost, — much
I mind what 's little, — least 's enough and to spare!
The little fillip on the coward's cheek
Serves as though crab-tree cudgel broke his pate.
Law has pronounced there 's punishment, less or more:
And I take note o' the fact and use it thus —
For the first flaw in the original bond,
I claim release. My contract was to wed
The daughter of Pietro and Violante. Both
Protest they never had a child at all.
Then I have never made a contract: good!
Cancel me quick the thing pretended one.
I shall be free. What matter if hurried over
The harbor-boom by a great favoring tide,
Or the last of a spent ripple that lifts and leaves?
The Abate is about it. Laugh who wins!
You shall not laugh me out of faith in law!
I listen, through all your noise, to Rome!"
Rome spoke.
In three months letters thence admonished me,
"Your plan for the divorce is all mistake.

It would hold, now, had you, taking thought to wed
Rachel of the blue eye and golden hair,
Found swarth-skinned Leah cumber couch next day:
But Rachel, blue-eyed golden-haired aright,
Proving to be only Laban's child, not Lot's,
Remains yours all the same forevermore.
No whit to the purpose is your plea: you err
I' the person and the quality — nowise
In the individual, — that's the case in point!
You go to the ground, — are met by a cross-suit
For separation, of the Rachel here,
From bed and board, — she is the injured one,
You did the wrong and have to answer it.
As for the circumstance of imprisonment
And color it lends to this your new attack,
Never fear, that point is considered too!
The durance is already at an end;
The convent-quiet preyed upon her health,
She is transferred now to her parents' house
— No-parents, when that cheats and plunders you,
But parentage again confessed in full,
When such confession pricks and plagues you more —
As now — for, this their house is not the house
In Via Vittoria wherein neighbors' watch
Might incommode the freedom of your wife,
But a certain villa smothered up in vines
At the town's edge by the gate i' the Pauline way,
Out of eye-reach, out of ear-shot, little and lone,
Whither a friend, — at Civita, we hope,
A good half-dozen-hours' ride off, — might, some eve,
Betake himself, and whence ride back, some morn,
Nobody the wiser: but be that as it may,
Do not afflict your brains with trifles now.
You have still three suits to manage, all and each
Ruinous truly should the event play false.
It is indeed the likelier so to do,
That brother Paul, your single prop and stay,
After a vain attempt to bring the Pope
To set aside procedures, sit himself
And summarily use prerogative,
Afford us the infallible finger's tact
To disentwine your tangle of affairs,
Paul, — finding it moreover past his strength
To stem the irruption, bear Rome's ridicule
Of . . . since friends must speak . . . to be round with
you . . .

Of the old outwitted husband, wronged and wroth,
Pitted against a brace of juveniles —
A brisk priest who is versed in Ovid's art
More than his "Summa," and a gamesome wife
Able to act Corinna without book,
Beside the waggish parents who played dupes
To dupe the duper — (and truly divers scenes
Of the Arezzo palace, tickle rib
And tease eye till the tears come, so we laugh;
Nor wants the shock at the inn its comic force,
And then the letters and poetry — *merum sal!*)
— Paul, finally, in such a state of things,
After a brief temptation to go jump
And join the fishes in the Tiber, drowns
Sorrow another and a wiser way:
House and goods, he has sold all off, is gone,
Leaves Rome, — whether for France or Spain, who knows?
Or Britain almost divided from our orb.
You have lost him anyhow."
Now, — I see my lords
Shift in their seat, — would I could do the same!
They probably please expect my bile was moved
To purpose, nor much blame me: now, they judge,
The fiery titillation urged my flesh
Break through the bonds. By your pardon, no, sweet Sirs!
I got such missives in the public place;
When I sought home, — with such news, mounted stair
And sat at last in the sombre gallery,
('T was Autumn, the old mother in bed betimes,
Having to bear that cold, the finer frame
Of her daughter-in-law had found intolerable —
The brother, walking misery away
O' the mountain-side with dog and gun belike,)
As I supped, ate the coarse bread, drank the wine
Weak once, now acrid with the toad's-head-squeeze,
My wife's bestowment, — I broke silence thus:
"Let me, a man, manfully meet the fact,
Confront the worst o' the truth, end, and have peace!
I am irremediably beaten here, —
The gross illiterate vulgar couple, — bah!
Why, they have measured forces, mastered mine,
Made me their spoil and prey from first to last.
They have got my name, — 't is nailed now fast to theirs,
The child or changeling is anyway my wife;
Point by point as they plan they execute,
They gain all, and I lose all — even to the lure

That led to loss, — they have the wealth again
They hazarded awhile to hook me with,
Have caught the fish and find the bait entire:
They even have their child or changeling back
To trade with, turn to account a second time.
The brother, presumably might tell a tale
Or give a warning, — he, too, flies the field,
And with him vanish help and hope of help.
They have caught me in the cavern where I fell,
Covered my loudest cry for human aid
With this enormous paving-stone of shame.
Well, are we demigods or merely clay?
Is success still attendant on desert?
Is this, we live on, heaven and the final state,
Or earth which means probation to the end?
Why claim escape from man's predestined lot
Of being beaten and baffled? — God's decree,
In which I, bowing bruised head, acquiesce.
One of us Franceschini fell long since
I' the Holy Land, betrayed, tradition runs,
To Paynims by the feigning of a girl
He rushed to free from ravisher, and found
Lay safe enough with friends in ambuscade
Who flayed him while she clapped her hands and laughed:
Let me end, falling by a like device.
It will not be so hard. I am the last
O' my line which will not suffer any more.
I have attained to my full fifty years,
(About the average of us all, 't is said,
Though it seems longer to the unlucky man)
— Lived through my share of life; let all end here,
Me and the house and grief and shame at once.
Friends my informants, — I can bear your blow!"
And I believe 't was in no unmeet match
For the stoic's mood, with something like a smile,
That, when morose December roused me next,
I took into my hand, broke seal to read
The new epistle from Rome. "All to no use!
Whate'er the turn next injury take," smiled I,
"Here 's one has chosen his part and knows his cue.
I am done with, dead now; strike away, good friends!
Are the three suits decided in a trice?
Against me, — there 's no question! How does it go?
Is the parentage of my wife demonstrated
Infamous to her wish? Parades she now
Loosed of the cincture that so irked the loin?

Is the last penny extracted from my purse
To mulct me for demanding the first pound
Was promised in return for value paid?
Has the priest, with nobody to court beside,
Courted the Muse in exile, hitched my hap
Into a rattling ballad-rhyme which, bawled
At tavern-doors, wakes rapture everywhere,
And helps cheap wine down throat this Christmas time,
Beating the bagpipes? Any or all of these!
As well, good friends, you cursed my palace here
To its old cold stone face, — stuck your cap for crest
Over the shield that 's extant in the Square, —
Or spat on the statue's cheek, the impatient world
Sees cumber tomb-top in our family church:
Let him creep under covert as I shall do,
Half below-ground already indeed. Good-bye!
My brothers are priests, and childless so; that 's well —
And, thank God most for this, no child leave I —
None after me to bear till his heart break
The being a Franceschini and my son!"

"Nay," said the letter, "but you have just that!
A babe, your veritable son and heir —
Lawful, — 't is only eight months since your wife
Left you, — so, son and heir, your babe was born
Last Wednesday in the villa, — you see the cause
For quitting Convent without beat of drum,
Stealing a hurried march to this retreat
That 's not so savage as the Sisterhood
To slips and stumbles: Pietro's heart is soft,
Violante leans to pity's side, — the pair
Ushered you into life a bouncing boy:
And he 's already hidden away and safe
From any claim on him you mean to make —
They need him for themselves, — don't fear, they know
The use o' the bantling, — the nerve thus laid bare
To nip at, new and nice, with finger-nail!"

Then I rose up like fire, and fire-like roared.
What, all is only beginning not ending now?
The worm which wormed its way from skin through flesh
To the bone and there lay biting, did its best, —
What, it goes on to scrape at the bone's self,
Will wind to inmost marrow and madden me?
There 's to be yet my representative,
Another of the name shall keep displayed

The flag with the ordure on it, brandish still
The broken sword has served to stir a jakes?
Who will he be, how will you call the man?
A Franceschini, — when who cut my purse,
Filched my name, hemmed me round, hustled me hard
As rogues at a fair some fool they strip i' the midst,
When these count gains, vaunt pillage presently: —
But a Caponsacchi, oh, be very sure!
When what demands its tribute of applause
Is the cunning and impudence o' the pair of cheats,
The lies and lust o' the mother, and the brave
Bold carriage of the priest, worthily crowned
By a witness to his feat i' the following age, —
And how this threefold cord could hook and fetch
And land leviathan that king of pride!
Or say, by some mad miracle of chance,
Is he indeed my flesh and blood, this babe?
Was it because fate forged a link at last
Betwixt my wife and me, and both alike
Found we had henceforth some one thing to love,
Was it when she could damn my soul indeed
She unlatched door, let all the devils o' the dark
Dance in on me to cover her escape?
Why then, the surplusage of disgrace, the spilth
Over and above the measure of infamy,
Failing to take effect on my coarse flesh
Seasoned with scorn now, saturate with shame, —
Is saved to instil on and corrode the brow,
The baby-softness of my first-born child —
The child I had died to see though in a dream,
The child I was bid strike out for, beat the wave
And baffle the tide of troubles where I swam,
So I might touch shore, lay down life at last
At the feet so dim and distant and divine
Of the apparition, as 't were Mary's babe
Had held, through night and storm, the torch aloft, —
Born now in very deed to bear this brand
On forehead and curse me who could not save!
Rather be the town-talk true, Square's jest, street's jeer
True, my own inmost heart's confession true,
And he the priest's bastard and none of mine!
Ay, there was cause for flight, swift flight and sure!
The husband gets unruly, breaks all bounds
When he encounters some familiar face,
Fashion of feature, brow and eyes and lips
Where he least looked to find them, — time to fly!

This bastard then, a nest for him is made,
As the manner is of vermin, in my flesh —
Shall I let the filthy pest buzz, flap and sting,
Busy at my vitals and, nor hand nor foot
Lift, but let be, lie still and rot resigned?
No, I appeal to God, — what says Himself,
How lessons Nature when I look to learn?
Why, that I am alive, am still a man
With brain and heart and tongue and right-hand too —
Nay, even with friends, in such a cause as this,
To right me if I fail to take my right.
No more of law; a voice beyond the law
Enters my heart, *Quis est pro Domino?*

Myself, in my own Vittiano, told the tale
To my own serving-people summoned there:
Told the first half of it, scarce heard to end
By judges who got done with judgment quick
And clamored to go execute her 'hest —
Who cried, "Not one of us that dig your soil
And dress your vineyard, prune your olive-trees,
But would have brained the man debauched our wife,
And staked the wife whose lust allured the man,
And paunched the Duke, had it been possible,
Who ruled the land, yet barred us such revenge!"
I fixed on the first whose eyes caught mine, some four
Resolute youngsters with the heart still fresh,
Filled my purse with the residue o' the coin
Uncaught-up by my wife whom haste made blind,
Donned the first rough and rural garb I found,
Took whatsoever weapon came to hand,
And out we flung and on we ran or reeled
Romeward. I have no memory of our way,
Only that, when at intervals the cloud
Of horror about me opened to let in life,
I listened to some song in the ear, some snatch
Of a legend, relic of religion, stray
Fragment of record very strong and old
Of the first conscience, the anterior right,
The God's-gift to mankind, impulse to quench
The antagonistic spark of hell and tread
Satan and all his malice into dust,
Declare to the world the one law, right is right.
Then the cloud re-encompassed me, and so
I found myself, as on the wings of winds,
Arrived: I was at Rome on Christmas Eve.

Festive bells — everywhere the Feast o' the Babe,
Joy upon earth, peace and good will to man!
I am baptized. I started and let drop
The dagger. "Where is it, His promised peace?"
Nine days o' the Birth-Feast did I pause and pray
To enter into no temptation more.
I bore the hateful house, my brother's once,
Deserted, — let the ghost of social joy
Mock and make mouths at me from empty room
And idle door that missed the master's step, —
Bore the frank wonder of incredulous eyes,
As my own people watched without a word,
Waited, from where they huddled round the hearth
Black like all else, that nod so slow to come.
I stopped my ears even to the inner call
Of the dread duty, only heard the song
"Peace upon earth," saw nothing but the face
O' the Holy Infant and the halo there
Able to cover yet another face
Behind it, Satan's, which I else should see.
But, day by day, joy waned and withered off:
The Babe's face, premature with peak and pine
Sank into wrinkled ruinous old age,
Suffering and death, then mist-like disappeared,
And showed only the Cross at end of all,
Left nothing more to interpose 'twixt me
And the dread duty, — for the angels' song,
"Peace upon earth," louder and louder pealed,
"O Lord, how long, how long be unavenged?"
On the ninth day, this grew too much for man.
I started up — "Some end must be!" At once,
Silence: then, scratching like a death-watch-tick,
Slowly within my brain was syllabled,
"One more concession, one decisive way
And but one, to determine thee the truth, —
This way, in fine, I whisper in thy ear:
Now doubt, anon decide, thereupon act!"

"That is a way, thou whisperest in my ear!
I doubt, I will decide, then act," said I —
Then beckoned my companions: "Time is come!"

And so, all yet uncertain save the will
To do right, and the daring aught save leave
Right undone, I did find myself at last
I' the dark before the villa with my friends,

And made the experiment, the final test,
Ultimate chance that ever was to be
For the wretchedness inside. I knocked — pronounced
The name, the predetermined touch for truth,
"What welcome for the wanderer? Open straight —"
To the friend, physician, friar upon his rounds,
Traveller belated, beggar lame and blind?
No, but — "to Caponsacchi!" And the door
Opened.

And then, — why, even then, I think,
I' the minute that confirmed my worst of fears,
Surely, — I pray God that I think aright! —
Had but Pompilia's self, the tender thing
Who once was good and pure, was once my lamb
And lay in my bosom, had the well-known shape
Fronted me in the doorway, — stood there faint
With the recent pang, perhaps, of giving birth
To what might, though by miracle, seem my child, —
Nay more, I will say, had even the aged fool
Pietro, the dotard, in whom folly and age
Wrought, more than enmity or malevolence,
To practise and conspire against my peace, —
Had either of these but opened, I had paused.
But it was she the hag, she that brought hell
For a dowry with her to her husband's house,
She the mock-mother, she that made the match
And married me to perdition, spring and source
O' the fire inside me that boiled up from heart
To brain and hailed the Fury gave it birth, —
Violante Comparini, she it was,
With the old grin amid the wrinkles yet,
Opened: as if in turning from the Cross,
With trust to keep the sight and save my soul,
I had stumbled, first thing, on the serpent's head
Coiled with a leer at foot of it.

There was the end!
Then was I rapt away by the impulse, one
Immeasurable everlasting wave of a need
To abolish that detested life. 'T was done:
You know the rest and how the folds o' the thing,
Twisting for help, involved the other two
More or less serpent-like: how I was mad,
Blind, stamped on all, the earth-worms with the asp,
And ended so.

You came on me that night,
Your officers of justice, — caught the crime

In the first natural frenzy of remorse?
Twenty miles off, sound sleeping as a child
On a cloak i' the straw which promised shelter first,
With the bloody arms beside me, — was it not so?
Wherefore not? Why, how else should I be found?
I was my own self, had my sense again,
My soul safe from the serpents. I could sleep:
Indeed and, dear my lords, I shall sleep now,
Spite of my shoulder, in five minutes' space,
When you dismiss me, having truth enough!
It is but a few days are passed, I find,
Since this adventure. Do you tell me, four?
Then the dead are scarce quiet where they lie,
Old Pietro, old Violante, side by side
At the church Lorenzo, — oh, they know it well!
So do I. But my wife is still alive,
Has breath enough to tell her story yet,
Her way, which is not mine, no doubt, at all.
And Caponsacchi, you have summoned him, —
Was he so far to send for? Not at hand?
I thought some few o' the stabs were in his heart,
Or had not been so lavish: less had served.
Well, he too tells his story, — florid prose
As smooth as mine is rough. You see, my lords,
There will be a lying intoxicating smoke
Born of the blood, — confusion probably, —
For lies breed lies — but all that rests with you!
The trial is no concern of mine; with me
The main of the care is over: I at least
Recognize who took that huge burden off,
Let me begin to live again. I did
God's bidding and man's duty, so, breathe free;
Look you to the rest! I heard Himself prescribe,
That great Physician, and dared lance the core
Of the bad ulcer; and the rage abates,
I am myself and whole now: I prove cured
By the eyes that see, the ears that hear again,
The limbs that have relearned their youthful play,
The healthy taste of food and feel of clothes
And taking to our common life once more,
All that now urges my defence from death.
The willingness to live, what means it else?
Before, — but let the very action speak!
Judge for yourselves, what life seemed worth to me
Who, not by proxy but in person, pitched
Head-foremost into danger as a fool

That never cares if he can swim or no —
So he but find the bottom, braves the brook.
No man omits precaution, quite neglects
Secrecy, safety, schemes not how retreat,
Having schemed he might advance.' Did I so scheme?
Why, with a warrant which 't is ask and have,
With horse thereby made mine without a word,
I had gained the frontier and slept safe that night.
Then, my companions, — call them what you please,
Slave or stipendiary, — what need of one
To me whose right-hand did its owner's work?
Hire an assassin yet expose yourself?
As well buy glove and then thrust naked hand
I' the thorn-bush. No, the wise man stays at home,
Sends only agents out, with pay to earn:
At home, when they come back, — he straight discards
Or else disowns. Why use such tools at all
When a man's foes are of his house, like mine,
Sit at his board, sleep in his bed? Why noise,
When there 's the *acquetta* and the silent way?
Clearly my life was valueless.

But now
Health is returned, and sanity of soul
Nowise indifferent to the body's harm.
I find the instinct bids me save my life;
My wits, too, rally round me; I pick up
And use the arms that strewed the ground before,
Unnoticed or spurned aside: I take my stand,
Make my defence. God shall not lose a life
May do Him further service, while I speak
And you hear, you my judges and last hope!
You are the law: 't is to the law I look.
I began life by hanging to the law,
To the law it is I hang till life shall end.
My brother made appeal to the Pope, 't is true,
To stay proceedings, judge my cause himself
Nor trouble law, — some fondness of conceit
That rectitude, sagacity sufficed
The investigator in a case like mine,
Dispensed with the machine of law. The Pope
Knew better, set aside my brother's plea
And put me back to law, — referred the cause
Ad judices meos, — doubtlessly did well.
Here, then, I clutch my judges, — I claim law —
Cry, by the higher law whereof your law

O' the land is humbly representative, —
Cry, on what point is it, where either accuse,
I fail to furnish you defence? I stand
Acquitted, actually or virtually,
By every intermediate kind of court
That takes account of right or wrong in man,
Each unit in the series that begins
With God's throne, ends with the tribunal here.
God breathes, not speaks, his verdicts, felt not heard,
Passed on successively to each court I call
Man's conscience, custom, manners, all that make
More and more effort to promulgate, mark
God's verdict in determinable words,
Till last come human jurists — solidify
Fluid result, — what 's fixable lies forged,
Statute, — the residue escapes in fume,
Yet hangs aloft, a cloud, as palpable
To the finer sense as word the legist welds.
Justinian's Pandects only make precise
What simply sparkled in men's eyes before,
Twitched in their brow or quivered on their lip,
Waited the speech they called but would not come.
These courts then, whose decree your own confirms, —
Take my whole life, not this last act alone,
Look on it by the light reflected thence!
What has Society to charge me with?
Come, unreservedly, — favor none nor fear, —
I am Guido Franceschini, am I not?
You know the courses I was free to take?
I took just that which let me serve the Church,
I gave it all my labor in body and soul
Till these broke down i' the service. "Specify?"
Well, my last patron was a Cardinal.
I left him unconvicted of a fault —
Was even helped, by way of gratitude,
Into the new life that I left him for,
This very misery of the marriage, — he
Made it, kind soul, so far as in him lay —
Signed the deed where you yet may see his name.
He is gone to his reward, — dead, being my friend
Who could have helped here also, — that, of course!
So far, there 's my acquittal, I suppose.
Then comes the marriage itself — no question, lords,
Of the entire validity of that!
In the extremity of distress, 't is true,
For after-reasons, furnished abundantly,

I wished the thing invalid, went to you
Only some months since, set you duly forth
My wrong and prayed your remedy, that a cheat
Should not have force to cheat my whole life long.
"Annul a marriage? 'T is impossible!
Though ring about your neck be brass not gold,
Needs must it clasp, gangrene you all the same!"
Well, let me have the benefit, just so far,
O' the fact announced, — my wife then is my wife,
I have allowance for a husband's right.
I am charged with passing right's due bound, — such acts
As I thought just, my wife called cruelty,
Complained of in due form, — convoked no court
Of common gossipry, but took her wrongs —
And not once, but so long as patience served —
To the town's top, jurisdiction's pride of place,
To the Archbishop and the Governor.
These heard her charge with my reply, and found
That futile, this sufficient: they dismissed
The hysteric querulous rebel, and confirmed
Authority in its wholesome exercise,
They, with directest access to the facts.
"— Ay, for it was their friendship favored you,
Hereditary alliance against a breach
I' the social order: prejudice for the name
Of Franceschini!" — So I hear it said:
But not here. You, lords, never will you say
"Such is the nullity of grace and truth,
Such the corruption of the faith, such lapse
Of law, such warrant have the Molinists
For daring reprehend us as they do, —
That we pronounce it just a common case,
Two dignitaries, each in his degree
First, foremost, this the spiritual head, and that
The secular arm o' the body politic,
Should, for mere wrongs' love and injustice' sake,
Side with, aid and abet in cruelty
This broken beggarly noble, — bribed perhaps
By his watered wine and mouldy crust of bread —
Rather than that sweet tremulous flower-like wife
Who kissed their hands and curled about their feet
Looking the irresistible loveliness
In tears that takes man captive, turns" . . . enough!
Do you blast your predecessors? What forbids
Posterity to trebly blast yourselves
Who set the example and instruct their tongue?

You dreaded the crowd, succumbed to the popular cry,
Or else, would nowise seem defer thereto
And yield to public clamor though i' the right!
You ridded your eye of my unseemliness,
The noble whose misfortune wearied you, —
Or, what 's more probable, made common cause
With the cleric section, punished in myself
Maladroit uncomplaisant laity,
Defective in behavior to a priest
Who claimed the customary partnership
I' the house and the wife. Lords, any lie will serve!
Look to it, — or allow me freed so far!

Then I proceed a step, come with clean hands
Thus far, re-tell the tale told eight months since.
The wife, you allow so far, I have not wronged,
Has fled my roof, plundered me and decamped
In company with the priest her paramour:
And I gave chase, came up with, caught the two
At the wayside inn where both had spent the night,
Found them in flagrant fault, and found as well,
By documents with name and plan and date,
The fault was furtive then that 's flagrant now,
Their intercourse a long established crime.
I did not take the license law's self gives
To slay both criminals o' the spot at the time,
But held my hand, — preferred play prodigy
Of patience which the world calls cowardice,
Rather than seem anticipate the law
And cast discredit on its organs, — you.
So, to your bar I brought both criminals,
And made my statement: heard their counter-charge,
Nay, — their corroboration of my tale,
Nowise disputing its allegements, not
I' the main, not more than nature's decency
Compels men to keep silence in this kind, —
Only contending that the deeds avowed
Would take another color and bear excuse.
You were to judge between us; so you did.
You disregard the excuse, you breathe away
The color of innocence and leave guilt black;
"Guilty" is the decision of the court,
And that I stand in consequence untouched,
One white integrity from head to heel.
Not guilty? Why then did you punish them?
True, punishment has been inadequate —

'Tis not I only, not my friends that joke,
My foes that jeer, who echo "inadequate" —
For, by a chance that comes to help for once,
The same case simultaneously was judged
At Arezzo, in the province of the Court
Where the crime had its beginning but not end
They then, deciding on but half o' the crime,
The effraction, robbery, — features of the fault
I never cared to dwell upon at Rome, —
What was it they adjudged as penalty
To Pompilia, — the one criminal o' the pair
Amenable to their judgment, not the priest
Who is Rome's? Why, just imprisonment for life
I' the Stinche. There was Tuscany's award
To a wife that robs her husband: you at Rome —
Having to deal with adultery in a wife
And, in a priest, breach of the priestly vow —
Give gentle sequestration for a month
In a manageable Convent, then release,
You call imprisonment, in the very house
O' the very couple, which the aim and end
Of the culprits' crime was — just to reach and rest
And there take solace and defy me: well, —
This difference 'twixt their penalty and yours
Is immaterial: make your penalty less —
Merely that she should henceforth wear black gloves
And white fan, she who wore the opposite —
Why, all the same the fact o' the thing subsists.
Reconcile to your conscience as you may,
Be it on your own heads, you pronounced but half
O' the penalty for heinousness like hers
And his, that pays a fault at Carnival
Of comfit-pelting past discretion's law,
Or accident to handkerchief in Lent
Which falls perversely as a lady kneels
Abruptly, and but half conceals her neck!
I acquiesce for my part: punished, though
By a pin-point scratch, means guilty: guilty means
— What have I been but innocent hitherto?
Anyhow, here the offence, being punished, ends.

Ends? — for you deemed so, did you not, sweet lords?
That was throughout the veritable aim
O' the sentence light or heavy, — to redress
Recognized wrong? You righted me, I think?
Well then, — what if I, at this last of all,

Demonstrate you, as my whole pleading proves,
No particle of wrong received thereby
One atom of right? — that cure grew worse disease?
That in the process you call "justice done"
All along you have nipped away just inch
By inch the creeping climbing length of plague
Breaking my tree of life from root to branch,
And left me, after all and every act
Of your interference, — lightened of what load?
At liberty wherein? Mere words and wind!
"Now I was saved, now I should feel no more
The hot breath, find a respite from fixed eye
And vibrant tongue!" Why, scarce your back was turned
There was the reptile, that feigned death at first,
Renewing its detested spire and spire
Around me, rising to such heights of hate
That, so far from mere purpose now to crush
And coil itself on the remains of me,
Body and mind, and there flesh fang content,
Its aim is now to evoke life from death,
Make me anew, satisfy in my son
The hunger I may feed but never sate,
Tormented on to perpetuity, —
My son, whom, dead, I shall know, understand,
Feel, hear, see, never more escape the sight
In heaven that's turned to hell, or hell returned
(So, rather, say) to this same earth again, —
Moulded into the image and made one,
Fashioned of soul as featured like in face,
First taught to laugh and lisp and stand and go
By that thief, poisoner and adulteress
I call Pompilia, he calls . . . sacred name,
Be unpronounced, be unpolluted here!
And last led up to the glory and prize of hate
By his . . . foster-father, Caponsacchi's self,
The perjured priest, pink of conspirators,
Tricksters and knaves, yet polished, superfine,
Manhood to model adolescence by!
Lords, look on me, declare, — when, what I show,
Is nothing more nor less than what you deemed
And doled me out for justice, — what did you say?
For reparation, restitution and more, —
Will you not thank, praise, bid me to your breasts
For having done the thing you thought to do,
And thoroughly trampled out sin's life at last?
I have heightened phrase to make your soft speech serve,

Doubled the blow you but essayed to strike,
Carried into effect your mandate here
That else had fallen to ground: mere duty done,
Oversight of the master just supplied
By zeal i' the servant. I, being used to serve,
Have simply . . . what is it they charge me with?
Blackened again, made legible once more
Your own decree, not permanently writ,
Rightly conceived but all too faintly traced.
It reads efficient, now, comminatory,
A terror to the wicked, answers so
The mood o' the magistrate, the mind of law.
Absolve, then, me, law's mere executant!
Protect your own defender, — save me, Sirs!
Give me my life, give me my liberty,
My good name and my civic rights again!
It would be too fond, too complacent play
Into the hands o' the devil, should we lose
The game here, I for God: a soldier-bee
That yields his life, exenterate with the stroke
O' the sting that saves the hive. I need that life.
Oh, never fear! I 'll find life plenty use
Though it should last five years more, aches and all!
For, first thing, there 's the mother's age to help —
Let her come break her heart upon my breast,
Not on the blank stone of my nameless tomb!
The fugitive brother has to be bidden back
To the old routine, repugnant to the tread,
Of daily suit and service to the Church, —
Through gibe and jest, those stones that Shimei flung!
Ay, and the spirit-broken youth at home,
The awe-struck altar-ministrant, shall make
Amends for faith now palsied at the source,
Shall see truth yet triumphant, justice yet
A victor in the battle of this world!
Give me — for last, best gift — my son again,
Whom law makes mine, — I take him at your word,
Mine be he, by miraculous mercy, lords!
Let me lift up his youth and innocence
To purify my palace, room by room
Purged of the memories, lend from his bright brow
Light to the old proud paladin my sire
Shrunk now for shame into the darkest shade
O' the tapestry, showed him once and shrouds him now!
Then may we, — strong from that rekindled smile, —
Go forward, face new times, the better day.

And when, in times made better through your brave
Decision now, — might but Utopia be! —
Rome rife with honest women and strong men,
Manners reformed, old habits back once more,
Customs that recognize the standard worth, —
The wholesome household rule in force again,
Husbands once more God's representative,
Wives like the typical Spouse once more, and Priests
No longer men of Belial, with no aim
At leading silly women captive, but
Of rising to such duties as yours now, —
Then will I set my son at my right-hand
And tell his father's story to this point,
Adding, "The task seemed superhuman, still
I dared and did it, trusting God and law:
And they approved of me: give praise to both!"
And if, for answer, he shall stoop to kiss
My hand, and peradventure start thereat, —
I engage to smile, "That was an accident
I' the necessary process, — just a trip
O' the torture-irons in their search for truth, —
Hardly misfortune, and no fault at all."

VI.

GIUSEPPE CAPONSACCHI.

Answer you, Sirs? Do I understand aright?
Have patience! In this sudden smoke from hell,—
So things disguise themselves,—I cannot see
My own hand held thus broad before my face
And know it again. Answer you? Then that means
Tell over twice what I, the first time, told
Six months ago: 't was here, I do believe,
Fronting you same three in this very room,
I stood and told you: yet now no one laughs,
Who then . . . nay, dear my lords, but laugh you did,
As good as laugh, what in a judge we style
Laughter—no levity, nothing indecorous, lords!
Only,—I think I apprehend the mood:
There was the blameless shrug, permissible smirk,
The pen's pretence at play with the pursed mouth,
The titter stifled in the hollow palm
Which rubbed the eyebrow and caressed the nose,
When I first told my tale: they meant, you know,
"The sly one, all this we are bound believe!
Well, he can say no other than what he says.
We have been young, too,—come, there's greater guilt!
Let him but decently disembroil himself,
Scramble from out the scrape nor move the mud,—
We solid ones may risk a finger-stretch!"
And now you sit as grave, stare as aghast
As if I were a phantom: now 't is—"Friend,
Collect yourself!"—no laughing matter more—
"Counsel the Court in this extremity,
Tell us again!"—tell that, for telling which,
I got the jocular piece of punishment,
Was sent to lounge a little in the place
Whence now of a sudden here you summon me
To take the intelligence from just—your lips!
You, Judge Tommati, who then tittered most,—
That she I helped eight months since to escape
Her husband, was retaken by the same,

Three days ago, if I have seized your sense, —
(I being disallowed to interfere,
Meddle or make in a matter none of mine,
For you and law were guardians quite enough
O' the innocent, without a pert priest's help) —
And that he has butchered her accordingly,
As she foretold and as myself believed, —
And, so foretelling and believing so,
We were punished, both of us, the merry way:
Therefore, tell once again the tale! For what?
Pompilia is only dying while I speak!
Why does the mirth hang fire and miss the smile?
My masters, there 's an old book, you should con
For strange adventures, applicable yet,
'T is stuffed with. Do you know that there was once
This thing: a multitude of worthy folk
Took recreation, watched a certain group
Of soldiery intent upon a game, —
How first they wrangled, but soon fell to play,
Threw dice, — the best diversion in the world.
A word in your ear, — they are now casting lots,
Ay, with that gesture quaint and cry uncouth,
For the coat of One murdered an hour ago!
I am a priest, — talk of what I have learned.
Pompilia is bleeding out her life belike,
Gasping away the latest breath of all,
This minute, while I talk — not while you laugh.

Yet, being sobered now, what is it you ask
By way of explanation? There 's the fact!
It seems to fill the universe with sight
And sound, — from the four corners of this earth
Tells itself over, to my sense at least.
But you may want it lower set i' the scale, —
Too vast, too close it clangs in the ear, perhaps;
You 'd stand back just to comprehend it more.
Well then, let me, the hollow rock, condense
The voice o' the sea and wind, interpret you
The mystery of this murder. God above!
It is too paltry, such a transference
O' the storm's roar to the cranny of the stone!

This deed, you saw begin — why does its end
Surprise you? Why should the event enforce
The lesson, we ourselves learned, she and I,
From the first o' the fact, and taught you, all in vain?

This Guido from whose throat you took my grasp,
Was this man to be favored, now, or feared,
Let do his will, or have his will restrained,
In the relation with Pompilia? — say!
Did any other man need interpose
— Oh, though first comer, though as strange at the work
As fribble must be, coxcomb, fool that 's near
To knave as, say, a priest who fears the world —
Was he bound brave the peril, save the doomed,
Or go on, sing his snatch and pluck his flower,
Keep the straight path and let the victim die?
I held so; you decided otherwise,
Saw no such peril, therefore no such need
To stop song, loosen flower, and leave path. Law,
Law was aware and watching, would suffice,
Wanted no priest's intrusion, palpably
Pretence, too manifest a subterfuge!
Whereupon I, priest, coxcomb, fribble and fool,
Ensconced me in my corner, thus rebuked,
A kind of culprit, over-zealous hound
Kicked for his pains to kennel; I gave place
To you, and let the law reign paramount:
I left Pompilia to your watch and ward,
And now you point me — there and thus she lies!

Men, for the last time, what do you want with me?
Is it, — you acknowledge, as it were, a use,
A profit in employing me? — at length
I may conceivably help the august law?
I am free to break the blow, next hawk that swoops
On next dove, nor miss much of good repute?
Or what if this your summons, after all,
Be but the form of mere release, no more,
Which turns the key and lets the captive go?
I have paid enough in person at Civita,
Am free, — what more need I concern me with?
Thank you! I am rehabilitated then,
A very reputable priest. But she —
The glory of life, the beauty of the world,
The splendor of heaven, . . . well, Sirs, does no one move?
Do I speak ambiguously? The glory, I say,
And the beauty, I say, and splendor, still say I,
Who, priest and trained to live my whole life long
On beauty and splendor, solely at their source,
God, — have thus recognized my food in her,
You tell me, that 's fast dying while we talk,

Pompilia! How does lenity to me
Remit one death-bed pang to her? Come, smile!
The proper wink at the hot-headed youth
Who lets his soul show, through transparent words,
The mundane love that 's sin and scandal too!
You are all struck acquiescent now, it seems:
It seems the oldest, gravest signor here,
Even the redoubtable Tommati, sits
Chopfallen, — understands how law might take
Service like mine, of brain and heart and hand,
In good part. Better late than never, law!
You understand of a sudden, gospel too
Has a claim here, may possibly pronounce
Consistent with my priesthood, worthy Christ,
That I endeavored to save Pompilia?

Then,
You were wrong, you see: that 's well to see, though late:
That 's all we may expect of man, this side
The grave: his good is — knowing he is bad:
Thus will it be with us when the books ope
And we stand at the bar on judgment-day.
Well then, I have a mind to speak, see cause
To relume the quenched flax by this dreadful light,
Burn my soul out in showing you the truth.
I heard, last time I stood here to be judged,
What is priest's-duty, — labor to pluck tares
And weed the corn of Molinism; let me
Make you hear, this time, how, in such a case,
Man, be he in the priesthood or at plough,
Mindful of Christ or marching step by step
With . . . what 's his style, the other potentate
Who bids have courage and keep honor safe,
Nor let minuter admonition tease? —
How he is bound, better or worse, to act.
Earth will not end through this misjudgment, no!
For you and the others like you sure to come,
Fresh work is sure to follow, — wickedness
That wants withstanding. Many a man of blood,
Many a man of guile will clamor yet,
Bid you redress his grievance, — as he clutched
The prey, forsooth a stranger stepped between,
And there 's the good gripe in pure waste! My part
Is done; i' the doing it, I pass away
Out of the world. I want no more with earth.
Let me, in heaven's name, use the very snuff

O' the taper in one last spark shall show truth
For a moment, show Pompilia who was true!
Not for her sake, but yours: if she is dead,
Oh, Sirs, she can be loved by none of you
Most or least priestly! Saints, to do us good,
Must be in heaven, I seem to understand:
We never find them saints before, at least.
Be her first prayer then presently for you —
She has done the good to me . . .
What is all this?
There, I was born, have lived, shall die, a fool!
This is a foolish outset: — might with cause
Give color to the very lie o' the man,
The murderer, — make as if I loved his wife
In the way he called love. He is the fool there!
Why, had there been in me the touch of taint,
I had picked up so much of knaves'-policy
As hide it, keep one hand pressed on the place
Suspected of a spot would damn us both.
Or no, not her! — not even if any of you
Dares think that I, i' the face of death, her death
That 's in my eyes and ears and brain and heart,
Lie, — if he does, let him! I mean to say,
So he stop there, stay thought from smirching her
The snow-white soul that angels fear to take
Untenderly. But, all the same, I know
I too am taintless, and I bare my breast.
You can't think, men as you are, all of you,
But that, to hear thus suddenly such an end
Of such a wonderful white soul, that comes
Of a man and murderer calling the white black,
Must shake me, trouble and disadvantage. Sirs,
Only seventeen!

Why, good and wise you are!
You might at the beginning stop my mouth:
So, none would be to speak for her, that knew.
I talk impertinently, and you bear,
All the same. This it is to have to do
With honest hearts: they easily may err,
But in the main they wish well to the truth.
You are Christians; somehow, no one ever plucked
A rag, even, from the body of the Lord,
To wear and mock with, but, despite himself,
He looked the greater and was the better. Yes,
I shall go on now. Does she need or not

I keep calm? Calm I 'll keep as monk that croons
Transcribing battle, earthquake, famine, plague,
From parchment to his cloister's chronicle.
Not one word more from the point now!

I begin.
Yes, I am one of your body and a priest.
Also I am a younger son o' the House
Oldest now, greatest once, in my birth-town
Arezzo, I recognize no equal there —
(I want all arguments, all sorts of arms
That seem to serve, — use this for a reason, wait!)
Not therefore thrust into the Church, because
O' the piece of bread one gets there. We were first
Of Fiesole, that rings still with the fame
Of Capo-in-Sacco our progenitor:
When Florence ruined Fiesole, our folk
Migrated to the victor-city, and there
Flourished, — our palace and our tower attest,
In the Old Mercato, — this was years ago,
Four hundred, full, — no, it wants fourteen just.
Our arms are those of Fiesole itself,
The shield quartered with white and red: a branch
Are the Salviati of us, nothing more.
That were good help to the Church? But better still —
Not simply for the advantage of my birth
I' the way of the world, was I proposed for priest;
But because there 's an illustration, late
I' the day, that 's loved and looked to as a saint
Still in Arezzo, he was bishop of,
Sixty years since: he spent to the last doit
His bishop's-revenue among the poor,
And used to tend the needy and the sick,
Barefoot, because of his humility.
He it was, — when the Granduke Ferdinand
Swore he would raze our city, plough the place
And sow it with salt, because we Aretines
Had tied a rope about the neck, to hale
The statue of his father from its base
For hate's sake, — he availed by prayers and tears
To pacify the Duke and save the town.
This was my father's father's brother. You see,
For his sake, how it was I had a right
To the selfsame office, bishop in the egg,
So, grew i' the garb and prattled in the school,
Was made expect, from infancy almost,

The proper mood o' the priest; till time ran by
And brought the day when I must read the vows,
Declare the world renounced, and undertake
To become priest and leave probation, — leap
Over the ledge into the other life,
Having gone trippingly hitherto up to the height
O'er the wan water. Just a vow to read!

I stopped short awe-struck. "How shall holiest flesh
Engage to keep such vow inviolate,
How much less mine? I know myself too weak,
Unworthy! Choose a worthier stronger man!"
And the very Bishop smiled and stopped my mouth
In its mid-protestation. "Incapable?
Qualmish of conscience? Thou ingenuous boy!
Clear up the clouds and cast thy scruples far!
I satisfy thee there 's an easier sense
Wherein to take such vow than suits the first
Rough rigid reading. Mark what makes all smooth,
Nay, has been even a solace to myself!
The Jews who needs must, in their synagogue,
Utter sometimes the holy name of God,
A thing their superstition boggles at,
Pronounce aloud the ineffable sacrosanct, —
How does their shrewdness help them? In this wise;
Another set of sounds they substitute,
Jumble so consonants and vowels — how
Should I know? — that there grows from out the old
Quite a new word that means the very same —
And o'er the hard place slide they with a smile.
Giuseppe Maria Caponsacchi mine,
Nobody wants you in these latter days
To prop the Church by breaking your backbone, —
As the necessary way was once, we know,
When Diocletian flourished and his like.
That building of the buttress-work was done
By martyrs and confessors: let it bide,
Add not a brick, but, where you see a chink,
Stick in a sprig of ivy or root a rose
Shall make amends and beautify the pile!
We profit as you were the painfullest
O' the martyrs, and you prove yourself a match
For the cruellest confessor ever was,
If you march boldly up and take your stand
Where their blood soaks, their bones yet strew the soil,
And cry 'Take notice, I the young and free

And well-to-do i' the world, thus leave the world,
Cast in my lot thus with no gay young world
But the grand old Church: she tempts me of the two!'
Renounce the world? Nay, keep and give it us!
Let us have you, and boast of what you bring.
We want the pick o' the earth to practise with,
Not its offscouring, halt and deaf and blind
In soul and body. There 's a rubble-stone
Unfit for the front o' the building, stuff to stow
In a gap behind and keep us weather-tight;
There 's porphyry for the prominent place. Good lack!
Saint Paul has had enough and to spare, I trow,
Of ragged run-away Onesimus:
He wants the right-hand with the signet-ring
Of King Agrippa, now, to shake and use.
I have a heavy scholar cloistered up,
Close under lock and key, kept at his task
Of letting Fénelon know the fool he is,
In a book I promise Christendom next Spring.
Why, if he covets so much meat, the clown,
As a lark's wing next Friday, or, any day,
Diversion beyond catching his own fleas,
He shall be properly swinged, I promise him.
But you, who are so quite another paste
Of a man, — do you obey me? Cultivate
Assiduous, that superior gift you have
Of making madrigals — (who told me? Ah!)
Get done a Marinesque Adoniad straight
With a pulse o' the blood a-pricking, here and there,
That I may tell the lady, 'And he 's ours!'"

So I became a priest: those terms changed all,
I was good enough for that, nor cheated so;
I could live thus and still hold head erect.
Now you see why I may have been before
A fribble and coxcomb, yet, as priest, break word
Nowise, to make you disbelieve me now.
I need that you should know my truth. Well, then,
According to prescription did I live,
— Conformed myself, both read the breviary
And wrote the rhymes, was punctual to my place
I' the Pieve, and as diligent at my post
Where beauty and fashion rule. I throve apace,
Sub-deacon, Canon, the authority
For delicate play at tarocs, and arbiter
O' the magnitude of fan-mounts: all the while

Wanting no whit the advantage of a hint
Benignant to the promising pupil, — thus:
"Enough attention to the Countess now,
The young one; 't is her mother rules the roast,
We know where, and puts in a word: go pay
Devoir to-morrow morning after mass!
Break that rash promise to preach, Passion-week!
Has it escaped you the Archbishop grunts
And snuffles when one grieves to tell his Grace
No soul dares treat the subject of the day
Since his own masterly handling it (ha, ha!)
Five years ago, — when somebody could help
And touch up an odd phrase in time of need,
(He, he!) — and somebody helps you, my son!
Therefore, don't prove so indispensable
At the Pieve, sit more loose i' the seat, nor grow
A fixture by attendance morn and eve!
Arezzo 's just a haven midway Rome —
Rome 's the eventual harbor, — make for port,
Crowd sail, crack cordage! And your cargo be
A polished presence, a genteel manner, wit
At will, and tact at every pore of you!
I sent our lump of learning, Brother Clout,
And Father Slouch, our piece of piety,
To see Rome and try suit the Cardinal.
Thither they clump-clumped, beads and book in hand,
And ever since 't is meat for man and maid
How both flopped down, prayed blessing on bent pate
Bald many an inch beyond the tonsure's need,
Never once dreaming, the two moony dolts,
There 's nothing moves his Eminence so much
As — far from all this awe at sanctitude —
Heads that wag, eyes that twinkle, modified mirth
At the closet-lectures on the Latin tongue
A lady learns so much by, we know where.
Why, body o' Bacchus, you should crave his rule
For pauses in the elegiac couplet, chasms
Permissible only to Catullus! There!
Now go to duty: brisk, break Priscian's head
By reading the day's office — there 's no help.
You 've Ovid in your poke to plaster that;
Amen 's at the end of all: then sup with me!"

Well, after three or four years of this life,
In prosecution of my calling, I
Found myself at the theatre one night

With a brother Canon, in a mood and mind
Proper enough for the place, amused or no:
When I saw enter, stand, and seat herself
A lady, young, tall, beautiful, strange and sad.
It was as when, in our cathedral once,
As I got yawningly through matin-song,
I saw *facchini* bear a burden up,
Base it on the high-altar, break away
A board or two, and leave the thing inside
Lofty and lone: and lo, when next I looked,
There was the Rafael! I was still one stare,
When — "Nay, I 'll make her give you back your gaze" —
Said Canon Conti; and at the word he tossed
A paper-twist of comfits to her lap,
And dodged and in a trice was at my back
Nodding from over my shoulder. Then she turned,
Looked our way, smiled the beautiful sad strange smile.
"Is not she fair? 'T is my new cousin," said he:
"The fellow lurking there i' the black o' the box
Is Guido, the old scapegrace: she 's his wife,
Married three years since: how his Countship sulks!
He has brought little back from Rome beside,
After the bragging, bullying. A fair face,
And — they do say — a pocket-full of gold
When he can worry both her parents dead.
I don't go much there, for the chamber 's cold
And the coffee pale. I got a turn at first
Paying my duty: I observed they crouched
— The two old frightened family spectres — close
In a corner, each on each like mouse on mouse
I' the cat's cage: ever since, I stay at home.
Hallo, there 's Guido, the black, mean and small,
Bends his brows on us — please to bend your own
On the shapely nether limbs of Light-skirts there
By way of a diversion! I was a fool
To fling the sweetmeats. Prudence, for God's love!
To-morrow I 'll make my peace, e'en tell some fib,
Try if I can't find means to take you there."

That night and next day did the gaze endure,
Burnt to my brain, as sunbeam through shut eyes,
And not once changed the beautiful sad strange smile.
At vespers Conti leaned beside my seat
I' the choir, — part said, part sung — "*In ex-cel-sis* —
All 's to no purpose: I have louted low,
But he saw you staring — *quia sub* — don't incline
To know you nearer: him we would not hold

For Hercules, — the man would lick your shoe
If you and certain efficacious friends
Managed him warily, — but there 's the wife:
Spare her, because he beats her, as it is,
She 's breaking her heart quite fast enough — *jam tu* —
So, be you rational and make amends
With little Light-skirts yonder — *in secula*
Secu-lo-o-o-o-rum. Ah, you rogue! Every one knows
What great dame she makes jealous: one against one,
Play, and win both!"
Sirs, ere the week was out,
I saw and said to myself, "Light-skirts hides teeth
Would make a dog sick, — the great dame shows spite
Should drive a cat mad: 't is but poor work this —
Counting one's fingers till the sonnet 's crowned.
I doubt much if Marino really be
A better bard than Dante after all.
'T is more amusing to go pace at eve
I' the Duomo, — watch the day's last gleam outside
Turn, as into a skirt of God's own robe,
Those lancet-windows' jewelled miracle, —
Than go eat the Archbishop's ortolans,
Digest his jokes. Luckily Lent is near:
Who cares to look will find me in my stall
At the Pieve, constant to this faith at least —
Never to write a canzonet any more."

So, next week, 't was my patron spoke abrupt,
In altered guise, "Young man, can it be true
That after all your promise of sound fruit,
You have kept away from Countess young or old
And gone play truant in church all day long?
Are you turning Molinist?" I answered quick:
"Sir, what if I turned Christian? It might be.
The fact is, I am troubled in my mind,
Beset and pressed hard by some novel thoughts.
This your Arezzo is a limited world;
There 's a strange Pope, — 't is said, a priest who thinks.
Rome is the port, you say: to Rome I go.
I will live alone, one does so in a crowd,
And look into my heart a little." "Lent
Ended," — I told friends, — "I shall go to Rome."

One evening I was sitting in a muse
Over the opened "Summa," darkened round
By the mid-March twilight, thinking how my life

Had shaken under me, — broke short indeed
And showed the gap 'twixt what is, what should be, —
And into what abysm the soul may slip,
Leave aspiration here, achievement there,
Lacking omnipotence to connect extremes —
Thinking moreover . . . oh, thinking, if you like,
How utterly dissociated was I
A priest and celibate, from the sad strange wife
Of Guido, — just as an instance to the point,
Nought more, — how I had a whole store of strengths
Eating into my heart, which craved employ,
And she, perhaps, need of a finger's help, —
And yet there was no way in the wide world
To stretch out mine and so relieve myself, —
How when the page o' the "Summa" preached its best,
Her smile kept glowing out of it, as to mock
The silence we could break by no one word, —
There came a tap without the chamber-door,
And a whisper, when I bade who tapped speak out,
And, in obedience to my summons, last
In glided a masked muffled mystery,
Laid lightly a letter on the opened book,
Then stood with folded arms and foot demure,
Pointing as if to mark the minutes' flight.

I took the letter, read to the effect
That she, I lately flung the comfits to,
Had a warm heart to give me in exchange,
And gave it, — loved me and confessed it thus,
And bade me render thanks by word of mouth,
Going that night to such a side o' the house
Where the small terrace overhangs a street
Blind and deserted, not the street in front:
Her husband being away, the surly patch,
At his villa of Vittiano.

"And you?" — I asked:
"What may you be?" "Count Guido's kind of maid —
Most of us have two functions in his house.
We all hate him, the lady suffers much,
'T is just we show compassion, furnish help,
Specially since her choice is fixed so well.
What answer may I bring to cheer the sweet
Pompilia?"

Then I took a pen and wrote.
"No more of this! That you are fair, I know:

But other thoughts now occupy my mind.
I should not thus have played the insensible
Once on a time. What made you, — may one ask, —
Marry your hideous husband? 'T was a fault,
And now you taste the fruit of it. Farewell."

"There!" smiled I as she snatched it and was gone —
"There, let the jealous miscreant, — Guido's self,
Whose mean soul grins through this transparent trick, —
Be balked so far, defrauded of his aim!
What fund of satisfaction to the knave,
Had I kicked this his messenger down stairs,
Trussed to the middle of her impudence,
And set his heart at ease so! No, indeed!
There 's the reply which he shall turn and twist
At pleasure, snuff at till his brain grow drunk,
As the bear does when he finds a scented glove
That puzzles him, — a hand and yet no hand,
Of other perfume than his own foul paw!
Last month, I had doubtless chosen to play the dupe,
Accepted the mock-invitation, kept
The sham appointment, cudgel beneath cloak,
Prepared myself to pull the appointer's self
Out of the window from his hiding-place
Behind the gown of this part-messenger
Part-mistress who would personate the wife.
Such had seemed once a jest permissible:
Now, I am not i' the mood."

Back next morn brought
The messenger, a second letter in hand.
"You are cruel, Thyrsis, and Myrtilla moans
Neglected but adores you, makes request
For mercy: why is it you dare not come?
Such virtue is scarce natural to your age:
You must love some one else; I hear you do,
The Baron's daughter or the Advocate's wife,
Or both, — all 's one, would you make me the third —
I take the crumbs from table gratefully
Nor grudge who feasts there. 'Faith, I blush and blaze!
Yet if I break all bounds, there 's reason sure.
Are you determinedly bent on Rome?
I am wretched here, a monster tortures me:
Carry me with you! Come and say you will!
Concert this very evening! Do not write!
I am ever at the window of my room
Over the terrace, at the *Ave*. Come!"

I questioned — lifting half the woman's mask
To let her smile loose. "So, you gave my line
To the merry lady?" "She kissed off the wax,
And put what paper was not kissed away,
In her bosom to go burn: but merry, no!
She wept all night when evening brought no friend,
Alone, the unkind missive at her breast;
Thus Philomel, the thorn at her breast too,
Sings" . . . "Writes this second letter?" "Even so!
Then she may peep at vespers forth?" — "What risk
Do we run o' the husband?" — "Ah, — no risk at all!
He is more stupid even than jealous. Ah —
That was the reason? Why, the man 's away!
Beside, his bugbear is that friend of yours,
Fat little Canon Conti. He fears him —
How should he dream of you? I told you truth:
He goes to the villa at Vittiano — 't is
The time when Spring-sap rises in the vine —
Spends the night there. And then his wife 's a child:
Does he think a child outwits him? A mere child:
Yet so full-grown, a dish for any duke.
Don't quarrel longer with such cates, but come!"

I wrote, "In vain do you solicit me.
I am a priest: and you are wedded wife,
Whatever kind of brute your husband prove.
I have scruples, in short. Yet should you really show
Sign at the window . . . but nay, best be good!
My thoughts are elsewhere." — "Take her that!"
— "Agair
Let the incarnate meanness, cheat and spy,
Mean to the marrow of him, make his heart
His food, anticipate hell's worm once more!
Let him watch shivering at the window — ay,
And let this hybrid, this his light-of-love
And lackey-of-lies, — a sage economy, —
Paid with embracings for the rank brass coin, —
Let her report and make him chuckle o'er
The breakdown of my resolution now,
And lour at disappointment in good time!
— So tantalize and so enrage by turns,
Until the two fall each on the other like
Two famished spiders, as the coveted fly
That toys long, leaves their net and them at last!'

And so the missives followed thick and fast
For a month, say, — I still came at every turn

On the soft sly adder, endlong 'neath my tread.
I was met i' the street, made sign to in the church,
A slip was found i' the door-sill, scribbled word
'Twixt page and page o' the prayer-book in my place.
A crumpled thing dropped even before my feet,
Pushed through the blind, above the terrace-rail,
As I passed, by day, the very window once.
And ever from corners would be peering up
The messenger, with the selfsame demand,
"Obdurate still, no flesh but adamant?
Nothing to cure the wound, assuage the throe
O' the sweetest lamb that ever loved a bear?"
And ever my one answer in one tone —
"Go your ways, temptress! Let a priest read, pray,
Unplagued of vain talk, visions not for him!
In the end, you'll have your will and ruin me!"

One day, a variation: thus I read:
"You have gained little by timidity.
My husband has found out my love at length,
Sees cousin Conti was the stalking-horse,
And you the game he covered, poor fat soul!
My husband is a formidable foe,
Will stick at nothing to destroy you. Stand
Prepared, or better, run till you reach Rome!
I bade you visit me, when the last place
My tyrant would have turned suspicious at,
Or cared to seek you in, was . . . why say, where?
But now all 's changed: beside, the season 's past
At the villa, — wants the master's eye no more.
Anyhow, I beseech you, stay away
From the window! He might well be posted there."

I wrote — "You raise my courage, or call up
My curiosity, who am but man.
Tell him he owns the palace, not the street
Under — that 's his and yours and mine alike.
If it should please me pad the path this eve,
Guido will have two troubles, first to get
Into a rage and then get out again.
Be cautious, though: at the *Ave!*"
You of the court!
When I stood question here and reached this point
O' the narrative, — search notes and see and say
If some one did not interpose with smile
And sneer, "And prithee why so confident

That the husband must, of all needs, not the wife,
Fabricate thus, — what if the lady loved?
What if she wrote the letters?"
Learned Sir,
I told you there 's a picture in our church.
Well, if a low-browed verger sidled up
Bringing me, like a blotch, on his prod's point,
A transfixed scorpion, let the reptile writhe,
And then said, "See a thing that Rafael made —
This venom issued from Madonna's mouth!"
I should reply, "Rather, the soul of you
Has issued from your body, like from like,
By way of the ordure-corner!"
But no less,
I tired of the same long black teasing lie
Obtruded thus at every turn; the pest
Was far too near the picture, anyhow:
One does Madonna service, making clowns
Remove their dung-heap from the sacristy.
"I will to the window, as he tempts," said I:
"Yes, whom the easy love has failed allure,
This new bait of adventure tempts, — thinks he.
Though the imprisoned lady keeps afar,
There will they lie in ambush, heads alert,
Kith, kin, and Count mustered to bite my heel.
No mother nor brother viper of the brood
Shall scuttle off without the instructive bruise!"

So, I went: crossed street and street: "The next street's turn,
I stand beneath the terrace, see, above,
The black of the ambush-window. Then, in place
Of hand's throw of soft prelude over lute,
And cough that clears way for the ditty last," —
I began to laugh already — "he will have
'Out of the hole you hide in, on to the front,
Count Guido Franceschini, show yourself!
Hear what a man thinks of a thing like you,
And after, take this foulness in your face!'"

The words lay living on my lip, I made
The one turn more — and there at the window stood,
Framed in its black square length, with lamp in hand,
Pompilia; the same great, grave, griefful air
As stands i' the dusk, on altar that I know,
Left alone with one moonbeam in her cell,
Our Lady of all the Sorrows. Ere I knelt —

Assured myself that she was flesh and blood —
She had looked one look and vanished.
I thought — "Just so:
It was herself, they have set her there to watch —
Stationed to see some wedding-band go by,
On fair pretence that she must bless the bride,
Or wait some funeral with friends wind past,
And crave peace for the corpse that claims its due.
She never dreams they used her for a snare,
And now withdraw the bait has served its turn.
Well done, the husband, who shall fare the worse!"
And on my lip again was — "Out with thee,
Guido!" When all at once she reappeared;
But, this time, on the terrace overhead,
So close above me, she could almost touch
My head if she bent down; and she did bend,
While I stood still as stone, all eye, all ear.

She began — "You have sent me letters, Sir:
I have read none, I can neither read nor write;
But she you gave them to, a woman here,
One of the people in whose power I am,
Partly explained their sense, I think, to me
Obliged to listen while she inculcates
That you, a priest, can dare love me, a wife,
Desire to live or die as I shall bid,
(She makes me listen if I will or no)
Because you saw my face a single time.
It cannot be she says the thing you mean;
Such wickedness were deadly to us both:
But good true love would help me now so much —
I tell myself, you may mean good and true.
You offer me, I seem to understand,
Because I am in poverty and starve,
Much money, where one piece would save my life.
The silver cup upon the altar-cloth
Is neither yours to give nor mine to take;
But I might take one bit of bread therefrom,
Since I am starving, and return the rest,
Yet do no harm: this is my very case.
I am in that strait, I may not dare abstain
From so much of assistance as would bring
The guilt of theft on neither you nor me;
But no superfluous particle of aid.
I think, if you will let me state my case,
Even had you been so fancy-fevered here,

Not your sound self, you must grow healthy now —
Care only to bestow what I can take.
That it is only you in the wide world,
Knowing me nor in thought nor word nor deed,
Who, all unprompted save by your own heart,
Come proffering assistance now, — were strange
But that my whole life is so strange: as strange
It is, my husband whom I have not wronged
Should hate and harm me. For his own soul's sake,
Hinder the harm! But there is something more,
And that the strangest: it has got to be
Somehow for my sake too, and yet not mine,
— This is a riddle — for some kind of sake
Not any clearer to myself than you,
And yet as certain as that I draw breath, —
I would fain live, not die — oh no, not die!
My case is, I was dwelling happily
At Rome with those dear Comparini, called
Father and mother to me; when at once
I found I had become Count Guido's wife:
Who then, not waiting for a moment, changed
Into a fury of fire, if once he was
Merely a man: his face threw fire at mine,
He laid a hand on me that burned all peace,
All joy, all hope, and last all fear away,
Dipping the bough of life, so pleasant once,
In fire which shrivelled leaf and bud alike,
Burning not only present life but past,
Which you might think was safe beyond his reach.
He reached it, though, since that beloved pair,
My father once, my mother all those years,
That loved me so, now say I dreamed a dream
And bid me wake, henceforth no child of theirs,
Never in all the time their child at all.
Do you understand? I cannot: yet so it is.
Just so I say of you that proffer help:
I cannot understand what prompts your soul,
I simply needs must see that it is so,
Only one strange and wonderful thing more.
They came here with me, those two dear ones, kept
All the old love up, till my husband, till
His people here so tortured them, they fled.
And now, is it because I grow in flesh
And spirit one with him their torturer,
That they, renouncing him, must cast off me?
If I were graced by God to have a child,

Could I one day deny God graced me so?
Then, since my husband hates me, I shall break
No law that reigns in this fell house of hate,
By using — letting have effect so much
Of hate as hides me from that whole of hate
Would take my life which I want and must have —
Just as I take from your excess of love
Enough to save my life with, all I need.
The Archbishop said to murder me were sin:
My leaving Guido were a kind of death
With no sin, — more death, he must answer for.
Hear now what death to him and life to you
I wish to pay and owe. Take me to Rome!
You go to Rome, the servant makes me hear.
Take me as you would take a dog, I think,
Masterless left for strangers to maltreat:
Take me home like that — leave me in the house
Where the father and the mother are; and soon
They 'll come to know and call me by my name,
Their child once more, since child I am, for all
They now forget me, which is the worst o' the dream —
And the way to end dreams is to break them, stand,
Walk, go: then help me to stand, walk and go!
The Governor said the strong should help the weak:
You know how weak the strongest women are.
How could I find my way there by myself?
I cannot even call out, make them hear —
Just as in dreams: I have tried and proved the fact.
I have told this story and more to good great men,
The Archbishop and the Governor: they smiled.
'Stop your mouth, fair one!' — presently they frowned,
'Get you gone, disengage you from our feet!'
I went in my despair to an old priest,
Only a friar, no great man like these two,
But good, the Augustinian, people name
Romano, — he confessed me two months since:
He fears God, why then needs he fear the world?
And when he questioned how it came about
That I was found in danger of a sin —
Despair of any help from providence, —
'Since, though your husband outrage you,' said he,
'That is a case too common, the wives die
Or live, but do not sin so deep as this' —
Then I told — what I never will tell you —
How, worse than husband's hate, I had to bear
The love, — soliciting to shame called love, —

Of his brother, — the young idle priest i' the house
With only the devil to meet there. 'This is grave —
Yes, we must interfere: I counsel, — write
To those who used to be your parents once,
Of dangers here, bid them convey you hence!'
'But,' said I, 'when I neither read nor write?'
Then he took pity and promised 'I will write.'
If he did so, — why, they are dumb or dead:
Either they give no credit to the tale,
Or else, wrapped wholly up in their own joy
Of such escape, they care not who cries, still
I' the clutches. Anyhow, no word arrives.
All such extravagance and dreadfulness
Seems incident to dreaming, cured one way, —
Wake me! The letter I received this morn,
Said — if the woman spoke your very sense —
'You would die for me:' I can believe it now:
For now the dream gets to involve yourself.
First of all, you seemed wicked and not good,
In writing me those letters: you came in
Like a thief upon me. I this morning said
In my extremity, entreat the thief!
Try if he have in him no honest touch!
A thief might save me from a murderer.
'Twas a thief said the last kind word to Christ:
Christ took the kindness and forgave the theft:
And so did I prepare what I now say.
But now, that you stand and I see your face,
Though you have never uttered word yet, — well, I know,
Here too has been dream-work, delusion too,
And that at no time, you with the eyes here,
Ever intended to do wrong by me,
Nor wrote such letters therefore. It is false,
And you are true, have been true, will be true.
To Rome then, — when is it you take me there?
Each minute lost is mortal. When? — I ask."

I answered, "It shall be when it can be.
I will go hence and do your pleasure, find
The sure and speedy means of travel, then
Come back and take you to your friends in Rome.
There wants a carriage, money and the rest, —
A day's work by to-morrow at this time.
How shall I see you and assure escape?"

She replied, "Pass, to-morrow at this hour.
If I am at the open window, well:

If I am absent, drop a handkerchief
And walk by! I shall see from where I watch,
And know that all is done. Return next eve,
And next, and so till we can meet and speak!"
"To-morrow at this hour I pass," said I.
She was withdrawn.
Here is another point
I bid you pause at. When I told thus far,
Some one said, subtly, "Here at least was found
Your confidence in error, — you perceived
The spirit of the letters, in a sort,
Had been the lady's, if the body should be
Supplied by Guido: say, he forged them all!
Here was the unforged fact — she sent for you,
Spontaneously elected you to help,
— What men call, loved you: Guido read her mind,
Gave it expression to assure the world
The case was just as he foresaw: he wrote,
She spoke."
Sirs, that first simile serves still, —
That falsehood of a scorpion hatched, I say,
Nowhere i' the world but in Madonna's mouth.
Go on! Suppose, that falsehood foiled, next eve
Pictured Madonna raised her painted hand,
Fixed the face Rafael bent above the Babe,
On my face as I flung me at her feet:
Such miracle vouchsafed and manifest,
Would that prove the first lying tale was true?
Pompilia spoke, and I at once received,
Accepted my own fact, my miracle
Self-authorized and self-explained, — she chose
To summon me and signify her choice.
Afterward, — oh! I gave a passing glance
To a certain ugly cloud-shape, goblin-shred
Of hell-smoke hurrying past the splendid moon
Out now to tolerate no darkness more,
And saw right through the thing that tried to pass
For truth and solid, not an empty lie:
"So, he not only forged the words for her
But words for me, made letters he called mine:
What I sent, he retained, gave these in place,
All by the mistress-messenger! As I
Recognized her, at potency of truth,
So she, by the crystalline soul, knew me,
Never mistook the signs. Enough of this —
Let the wraith go to nothingness again,
Here is the orb, have only thought for her!"

"Thought?" nay, Sirs, what shall follow was not thought:
I have thought sometimes, and thought long and hard.
I have stood before, gone round a serious thing,
Tasked my whole mind to touch and clasp it close,
As I stretch forth my arm to touch this bar.
God and man, and what duty I owe both, —
I dare to say I have confronted these
In thought: but no such faculty helped here.
I put forth no thought, — powerless, all that night
I paced the city: it was the first Spring.
By the invasion I lay passive to,
In rushed new things, the old were rapt away;
Alike abolished — the imprisonment
Of the outside air, the inside weight o' the world
That pulled me down. Death meant, to spurn the ground,
Soar to the sky, — die well and you do that.
The very immolation made the bliss;
Death was the heart of life, and all the harm
My folly had crouched to avoid, now proved a veil
Hiding all gain my wisdom strove to grasp:
As if the intense centre of the flame
Should turn a heaven to that devoted fly
Which hitherto, sophist alike and sage,
Saint Thomas with his sober gray goose-quill,
And sinner Plato by Cephisian reed,
Would fain, pretending just the insect's good,
Whisk off, drive back, consign to shade again.
Into another state, under new rule
I knew myself was passing swift and sure;
Whereof the initiatory pang approached,
Felicitous annoy, as bitter-sweet
As when the virgin-band, the victors chaste,
Feel at the end the earthly garments drop,
And rise with something of a rosy shame
Into immortal nakedness: so I
Lay, and let come the proper throe would thrill
Into the ecstasy and outthrob pain.

I' the gray of dawn it was I found myself
Facing the pillared front o' the Pieve — mine,
My church: it seemed to say for the first time,
"But am not I the Bride, the mystic love
O' the Lamb, who took thy plighted troth, my priest,
To fold thy warm heart on my heart of stone
And freeze thee nor unfasten any more?
This is a fleshly woman, — let the free

Bestow their life-blood, thou art pulseless now!"
See! Day by day I had risen and left this church
At the signal waved me by some foolish fan,
With half a curse and half a pitying smile
For the monk I stumbled over in my haste,
Prostrate and corpse-like at the altar-foot
Intent on his *corona:* then the church
Was ready with her quip, if word conduced,
To quicken my pace nor stop for prating —"There!
Be thankful you are no such ninny, go
Rather to teach a black-eyed novice cards
Than gabble Latin and protrude that nose
Smoothed to a sheep's through no brains and much faith!"
That sort of incentive! Now the church changed tone —
Now, when I found out first that life and death
Are means to an end, that passion uses both,
Indisputably mistress of the man
Whose form of worship is self-sacrifice:
Now, from the stone lungs sighed the scrannel voice,
"Leave that live passion, come be dead with me!"
As if, i' the fabled garden, I had gone
On great adventure, plucked in ignorance
Hedge-fruit, and feasted to satiety,
Laughing at such high fame for hips and haws,
And scorned the achievement: then come all at once
O' the prize o' the place, the thing of perfect gold,
The apple's self: and, scarce my eye on that,
Was 'ware as well o' the seven-fold dragon's watch.

Sirs, I obeyed. Obedience was too strange, —
This new thing that had been struck into me
By the look o' the lady, — to dare disobey
The first authoritative word. 'T was God's.
I had been lifted to the level of her,
Could take such sounds into my sense. I said,
"We two are cognizant o' the Master now;
She it is bids me bow the head: how true,
I am a priest! I see the function here;
I thought the other way self-sacrifice:
This is the true, seals up the perfect sum.
I pay it, sit down, silently obey."

So, I went home. Dawn broke, noon broadened, I —
I sat stone-still, let time run over me.
The sun slanted into my room, had reached
The west. I opened book, — Aquinas blazed

With one black name only on the white page.
I looked up, saw the sunset: vespers rang:
"She counts the minutes till I keep my word
And come say all is ready. I am a priest.
Duty to God is duty to her: I think
God, who created her, will save her too
Some new way, by one miracle the more,
Without me. Then, prayer may avail perhaps."
I went to my own place i' the Pieve, read
The office: I was back at home again
Sitting i' the dark. "Could she but know — but know
That, were there good in this distinct from God's,
Really good as it reached her, though procured
By a sin of mine, — I should sin: God forgives.
She knows it is no fear withholds me: fear?
Of what? Suspense here is the terrible thing.
If she should, as she counts the minutes, come
On the fantastic notion that I fear
The world now, fear the Archbishop, fear perhaps
Count Guido, he who, having forged the lies,
May wait the work, attend the effect, — I fear
The sword of Guido! Let God see to that —
Hating lies, let not her believe a lie!"

Again the morning found me. "I will work,
Tie down my foolish thoughts. Thank God so far!
I have saved her from a scandal, stopped the tongues
Had broken else into a cackle and hiss
Around the noble name. Duty is still
Wisdom: I have been wise." So the day wore.

At evening — "But, achieving victory,
I must not blink the priest's peculiar part,
Nor shrink to counsel, comfort: priest and friend —
How do we discontinue to be friends?
I will go minister, advise her seek
Help at the source, — above all, not despair:
There may be other happier help at hand.
I hope it, — wherefore then neglect to say?"

There she stood — leaned there, for the second time,
Over the terrace, looked at me, then spoke:
"Why is it you have suffered me to stay
Breaking my heart two days more than was need?
Why delay help, your own heart yearns to give?
You are again here, in the selfsame mind,

I see here, steadfast in the face of you, —
You grudge to do no one thing that I ask.
Why then is nothing done? You know my need.
Still, through God's pity on me, there is time
And one day more: shall I be saved or no?"
I answered — "Lady, waste no thought, no word
Even to forgive me! Care for what I care —
Only! Now follow me as I were fate!
Leave this house in the dark to-morrow night,
Just before daybreak: — there 's new moon this eve —
It sets, and then begins the solid black.
Descend, proceed to the Torrione, step
Over the low dilapidated wall,
Take San Clemente, there 's no other gate
Unguarded at the hour: some paces thence
An inn stands; cross to it; I shall be there."

She answered, "If I can but find the way.
But I shall find it. Go now!"

I did go,
Took rapidly the route myself prescribed,
Stopped at Torrione, climbed the ruined place,
Proved that the gate was practicable, reached
The inn, no eye, despite the dark, could miss,
Knocked there and entered, made the host secure:
"With Caponsacchi it is ask and have;
I know my betters. Are you bound for Rome?
I get swift horse and trusty man," said he.

Then I retraced my steps, was found once more
In my own house for the last time: there lay
The broad pale opened "Summa." "Shut his book,
There 's other showing! 'T was a Thomas too
Obtained, — more favored than his namesake here, —
A gift, tied faith fast, foiled the tug of doubt, —
Our Lady's girdle; down he saw it drop
As she ascended into heaven, they say:
He kept that safe and bade all doubt adieu.
I too have seen a lady and hold a grace."

I know not how the night passed: morning broke,
Presently came my servant. "Sir, this eve —
Do you forget?" I started. "How forget?
What is it you know?" "With due submission, Sir,
This being last Monday in the month but one,

And a vigil, since to-morrow is Saint George,
And feast-day, and moreover day for copes,
And Canon Conti now away a month,
And Canon Crispi sour because, forsooth,
You let him sulk in stall and bear the brunt
Of the octave. . . . Well, Sir, 't is important!"
"True!
Hearken, I have to start for Rome this night.
No word, lest Crispi overboil and burst!
Provide me with a laic dress! Throw dust
I' the Canon's eye, stop his tongue's scandal so!
See there 's a sword in case of accident."
I knew the knave, the knave knew me.

And thus
Through each familiar hindrance of the day
Did I make steadily for its hour and end, —
Felt time's old barrier-growth of right and fit
Give way through all its twines, and let me go.
Use and wont recognized the excepted man,
Let speed the special service, — and I sped
Till, at the dead between midnight and morn,
There was I at the goal, before the gate,
With a tune in the ears, low leading up to loud,
A light in the eyes, faint that would soon be flare,
Ever some spiritual witness new and new
In faster frequence, crowding solitude
To watch the way o' the warfare, — till, at last,
When the ecstatic minute must bring birth,
Began a whiteness in the distance, waxed
Whiter and whiter, near grew and more near,
Till it was she: there did Pompilia come:
The white I saw shine through her was her soul's,
Certainly, for the body was one black,
Black from head down to foot. She did not speak,
Glided into the carriage, — so a cloud
Gathers the moon up. "By San Spirito,
To Rome, as if the road burned underneath!
Reach Rome, then hold my head in pledge, I pay
The run and the risk to heart's content!" Just that,
I said, — then, in another tick of time,
Sprang, was beside her, she and I alone.

So it began, our flight through dusk to clear,
Through day and night and day again to night
Once more, and to last dreadful dawn of all.

Sirs, how should I lie quiet in my grave
Unless you suffer me wring, drop by drop,
My brain dry, make a riddance of the drench
Of minutes with a memory in each,
Recorded motion, breath or look of hers,
Which poured forth would present you one pure glass,
Mirror you plain, — as God's sea, glassed in gold,
His saints, — the perfect soul Pompilia? Men,
You must know that a man gets drunk with truth
Stagnant inside him! Oh, they 've killed her, Sirs!
Can I be calm?
Calmly! Each incident
Proves, I maintain, that action of the flight
For the true thing it was. The first faint scratch
O' the stone will test its nature, teach its worth
To idiots who name Parian — coprolite.
After all, I shall give no glare — at best
Only display you certain scattered lights
Lamping the rush and roll of the abyss:
Nothing but here and there a fire-point pricks
Wavelet from wavelet: well!
For the first hour
We both were silent in the night, I know:
Sometimes I did not see nor understand.
Blackness engulfed me, — partial stupor, say —
Then I would break way, breathe through the surprise,
And be aware again, and see who sat
In the dark vest with the white face and hands.
I said to myself — "I have caught it, I conceive
The mind o' the mystery: 't is the way they wake
And wait, two martyrs somewhere in a tomb
Each by each as their blessing was to die;
Some signal they are promised and expect, —
When to arise before the trumpet scares:
So, through the whole course of the world they wait
The last day, but so fearless and so safe!
No otherwise, in safety and not fear,
I lie, because she lies too by my side."
You know this is not love, Sirs, — it is faith,
The feeling that there 's God, he reigns and rules
Out of this low world: that is all; no harm!
At times she drew a soft sigh — music seemed
Always to hover just above her lips,
Not settle, — break a silence music too.

In the determined morning, I first found
Her head erect, her face turned full to me,

Her soul intent on mine through two wide eyes.
I answered them. "You are saved hitherto.
We have passed Perugia, — gone round by the wood,
Not through, I seem to think, — and opposite
I know Assisi; this is holy ground."
Then she resumed. "How long since we both left
Arezzo?" — "Years — and certain hours beside."

It was at . . . ah, but I forget the names!
'T is a mere post-house and a hovel or two;
I left the carriage and got bread and wine
And brought it her. — "Does it detain to eat?"
"— They stay perforce, change horses, — therefore eat!
We lose no minute: we arrive, be sure!"
This was — I know not where — there 's a great hill
Close over, and the stream has lost its bridge,
One fords it. She began — "I have heard say
Of some sick body that my mother knew,
'T was no good sign when in a limb diseased
All the pain suddenly departs, — as if
The guardian angel discontinued pain
Because the hope of cure was gone at last:
The limb will not again exert itself,
It needs be pained no longer: so with me,
— My soul whence all the pain is past at once:
All pain must be to work some good in the end.
True, this I feel now, this may be that good,
Pain was because of, — otherwise, I fear!"

She said, — a long while later in the day,
When I had let the silence be, — abrupt —
"Have you a mother?" "She died, I was born."
"A sister then?" "No sister." "Who was it —
What woman were you used to serve this way,
Be kind to, till I called you and you came?"
I did not like that word. Soon afterward —
"Tell me, are men unhappy, in some kind
Of mere unhappiness at being men,
As women suffer, being womanish?
Have you, now, some unhappiness, I mean,
Born of what may be man's strength overmuch,
To match the undue susceptibility,
The sense at every pore when hate is close?
It hurts us if a baby hides its face
Or child strikes at us punily, calls names
Or makes a mouth, — much more if stranger men

Laugh or frown, — just as that were much to bear!
Yet rocks split, — and the blow-ball does no more,
Quivers to feathery nothing at a touch;
And strength may have its drawback, weakness 'scapes."

Once she asked, "What is it that made you smile,
At the great gate with the eagles and the snakes,
Where the company entered, 't is a long time since?"
"— Forgive — I think you would not understand:
Ah, but you ask me, — therefore, it was this.
That was a certain bishop's villa-gate,
I knew it by the eagles, — and at once
Remembered this same bishop was just he
People of old were wont to bid me please
If I would catch preferment: so, I smiled
Because an impulse came to me, a whim —
What if I prayed the prelate leave to speak,
Began upon him in his presence-hall
— 'What, still at work so gray and obsolete?
Still rocheted and mitred more or less?
Don't you feel all that out of fashion now?
I find out when the day of things is done!'"

At eve we heard the *angelus:* she turned —
"I told you I can neither read nor write.
My life stopped with the play-time; I will learn,
If I begin to live again: but you —
Who are a priest — wherefore do you not read
The service at this hour? Read Gabriel's song,
The lesson, and then read the little prayer
To Raphael, proper for us travellers!"
I did not like that, neither, but I read.

When we stopped at Foligno it was dark.
The people of the post came out with lights:
The driver said, "This time to-morrow, may
Saints only help, relays continue good,
Nor robbers hinder, we arrive at Rome."
I urged, — "Why tax your strength a second night?
Trust me, alight here and take brief repose!
We are out of harm's reach, past pursuit: go sleep
If but an hour! I keep watch, guard the while
Here in the doorway." But her whole face changed,
The misery grew again about her mouth,
The eyes burned up from faintness, like the fawn's
Tired to death in the thicket, when she feels

The probing spear o' the huntsman. "Oh, no stay!"
She cried, in the fawn's cry, "On to Rome, on, on —
Unless 't is you who fear, — which cannot be!"

We did go on all night; but at its close
She was troubled, restless, moaned low, talked at whiles
To herself, her brow on quiver with the dream:
Once, wide awake, she menaced, at arms' length
Waved away something — "Never again with you!
My soul is mine, my body is my soul's:
You and I are divided ever more
In soul and body: get you gone!" Then I —
"Why, in my whole life I have never prayed!
Oh, if the God, that only can, would help!
Am I his priest with power to cast out fiends?
Let God arise and all his enemies
Be scattered!" By morn, there was peace, no sigh
Out of the deep sleep.

When she woke at last,
I answered the first look — "Scarce twelve hours more,
Then, Rome! There probably was no pursuit,
There cannot now be peril: bear up brave!
Just some twelve hours to press through to the prize:
Then, no more of the terrible journey!" "Then,
No more o' the journey: if it might but last!
Always, my life-long, thus to journey still!
It is the interruption that I dread, —
With no dread, ever to be here and thus!
Never to see a face nor hear a voice!
Yours is no voice; you speak when you are dumb;
Nor face, I see it in the dark. I want
No face nor voice that change and grow unkind."
That I liked, that was the best thing she said.

In the broad day, I dared entreat, "Descend!"
I told a woman, at the garden-gate
By the post-house, white and pleasant in the sun,
"It is my sister, — talk with her apart!
She is married and unhappy, you perceive;
I take her home because her head is hurt;
Comfort her as you women understand!"
So, there I left them by the garden-wall,
Paced the road, then bade put the horses to,
Came back, and there she sat: close to her knee,
A black-eyed child still held the bowl of milk,

Wondered to see how little she could drink,
And in her arms the woman's infant lay.
She smiled at me, "How much good this has done!
This is a whole night's rest and how much more!
I can proceed now, though I wish to stay.
How do you call that tree with the thick top
That holds in all its leafy green and gold
The sun now like an immense egg of fire?"
(It was a million-leaved mimosa.) "Take
The babe away from me and let me go!"
And in the carriage, "Still a day, my friend!
And perhaps half a night, the woman fears.
I pray it finish since it cannot last.
There may be more misfortune at the close,
And where will you be? God suffice me then!"
And presently — for there was a roadside-shrine —
"When I was taken first to my own church
Lorenzo in Lucina, being a girl,
And bid confess my faults, I interposed
'But teach me what fault to confess and know!'
So, the priest said — 'You should bethink yourself:
Each human being needs must have done wrong!'
Now, be you candid and no priest but friend —
Were I surprised and killed here on the spot,
A runaway from husband and his home,
Do you account it were in sin I died?
My husband used to seem to harm me, not . . .
Not on pretence he punished sin of mine,
Nor for sin's sake and lust of cruelty,
But as I heard him bid a farming-man
At the villa take a lamb once to the wood
And there ill-treat it, meaning that the wolf
Should hear its cries, and so come, quick be caught,
Enticed to the trap: he practised thus with me
That so, whatever were his gain thereby,
Others than I might become prey and spoil.
Had it been only between our two selves, —
His pleasure and my pain, — why, pleasure him
By dying, nor such need to make a coil!
But this was worth an effort, that my pain
Should not become a snare, prove pain threefold
To other people — strangers — or unborn —
How should I know? I sought release from that —
I think, or else from, — dare I say, some cause
Such as is put into a tree, which turns
Away from the north wind with what nest it holds, —

The woman said that trees so turn: now, friend,
Tell me, because I cannot trust myself!
You are a man: what have I done amiss?"
You must conceive my answer, — I forget —
Taken up wholly with the thought, perhaps,
This time she might have said, — might, did not say —
"You are a priest." She said, "my friend."
Day wore,
We passed the places, somehow the calm went,
Again the restless eyes began to rove
In new fear of the foe mine could not see.
She wandered in her mind, — addressed me once
"Gaetano!" — that is not my name: whose name?
I grew alarmed, my head seemed turning too.
I quickened pace with promise now, now threat:
Bade drive and drive, nor any stopping more.
"Too deep i' the thick of the struggle, struggle through!
Then drench her in repose though death's self pour
The plenitude of quiet, — help us, God,
Whom the winds carry!"

Suddenly I saw
The old tower, and the little white-walled clump
Of buildings and the cypress-tree or two, —
"Already Castelnuovo — Rome!" I cried,
"As good as Rome, — Rome is the next stage, think!
This is where travellers' hearts are wont to beat.
Say you are saved, sweet lady!" Up she woke.
The sky was fierce with color from the sun
Setting. She screamed out, "No, I must not die!
Take me no farther, I should die: stay here!
I have more life to save than mine!"
She swooned.
We seemed safe: what was it foreboded so?
Out of the coach into the inn I bore
The motionless and breathless pure and pale
Pompilia, — bore her through a pitying group
And laid her on a couch, still calm and cured
By deep sleep of all woes at once. The host
Was urgent, "Let her stay an hour or two!
Leave her to us, all will be right by morn!"
Oh, my foreboding! But I could not choose.

I paced the passage, kept watch all night long.
I listened, — not one movement, not one sigh.
"Fear not: she sleeps so sound!" they said: but I

Feared, all the same, kept fearing more and more,
Found myself throb with fear from head to foot,
Filled with a sense of such impending woe,
That, at first pause of night, pretence of gray,
I made my mind up it was morn. — "Reach Rome,
Lest hell reach her! A dozen miles to make,
Another long breath, and we emerge!" I stood
I' the courtyard, roused the sleepy grooms. "Have out
Carriage and horse, give haste, take gold!" said I.
While they made ready in the doubtful morn, —
'T was the last minute, — needs must I ascend
And break her sleep; I turned to go.
And there
Faced me Count Guido, there posed the mean man
As master, — took the field, encamped his rights,
Challenged the world: there leered new triumph, there
Scowled the old malice in the visage bad
And black o' the scamp. Soon triumph suppled the tongue
A little, malice glued to his dry throat,
And he part howled, part hissed . . . oh, how he kept
Well out o' the way, at arm's length and to spare! —
"My salutation to your priestship! What?
Matutinal, busy with book so soon
Of an April day that 's damp as tears that now
Deluge Arezzo at its darling's flight? —
'T is unfair, wrongs feminity at large,
To let a single dame monopolize
A heart the whole sex claims, should share alike:
Therefore I overtake you, Canon! Come!
The lady, — could you leave her side so soon?
You have not yet experienced at her hands
My treatment, you lay down undrugged, I see!
Hence this alertness — hence no death-in-life
Like what held arms fast when she stole from mine.
To be sure, you took the solace and repose
That first night at Foligno! — news abound
O' the road by this time, — men regaled me much,
As past them I came halting after you,
Vulcan pursuing Mars, as poets sing, —
Still at the last here pant I, but arrive,
Vulcan — and not without my Cyclops too,
The Commissary and the unpoisoned arm
O' the Civil Force, should Mars turn mutineer.
Enough of fooling: capture the culprits, friend!
Here is the lover in the smart disguise
With the sword, — he is a priest, so mine lies still.

There upstairs hides my wife the runaway,
His leman: the two plotted, poisoned first,
Plundered me after, and eloped thus far
Where now you find them. Do your duty quick!
Arrest and hold him! That's done: now catch her!"
During this speech of that man, — well, I stood
Away, as he managed, — still, I stood as near
The throat of him, — with these two hands, my own, —
As now I stand near yours, Sir, — one quick spring,
One great good satisfying gripe, and lo!
There had he lain abolished with his lie,
Creation purged o' the miscreate, man redeemed,
A spittle wiped off from the face of God!
I, in some measure, seek a poor excuse
For what I left undone, in just this fact
That my first feeling at the speech I quote
Was — not of what a blasphemy was dared,
Not what a bag of venomed purulence
Was split and noisome, — but how splendidly
Mirthful, how ludicrous a lie was launched!
Would Molière's self wish more than hear such man
Call, claim such woman for his own, his wife,
Even though, in due amazement at the boast,
He had stammered, she moreover was divine?
She to be his, — were hardly less absurd
Than that he took her name into his mouth,
Licked, and then let it go again, the beast,
Signed with his slaver. Oh, she poisoned him,
Plundered him, and the rest! Well, what I wished
Was, that he would but go on, say once more
So to the world, and get his meed of men,
The fist's reply to the filth. And while I mused,
The minute, oh the misery, was gone!
On either idle hand of me there stood
Really an officer, nor laughed i' the least:
Nay, rendered justice to his reason, laid
Logic to heart, as 't were submitted them
"Twice two makes four."

"And now, catch her!" — he cried.
That sobered me. "Let myself lead the way —
Ere you arrest me, who am somebody,
Being, as you hear, a priest and privileged, —
To the lady's chamber! I presume you — men
Expert, instructed how to find out truth,
Familiar with the guise of guilt. Detect
Guilt on her face when it meets mine, then judge

Between us and the mad dog howling there!"
Up we all went together, in they broke
O' the chamber late my chapel. There she lay,
Composed as when I laid her, that last eve,
O' the couch, still breathless, motionless, sleep's self,
Wax-white, seraphic, saturate with the sun
O' the morning that now flooded from the front
And filled the window with a light like blood.
"Behold the poisoner, the adulteress,
—And feigning sleep too! Seize, bind!" Guido hissed.

She started up, stood erect, face to face
With the husband: back he fell, was buttressed there
By the window all aflame with morning-red,
He the black figure, the opprobrious blur
Against all peace and joy and light and life.
"Away from between me and hell!" she cried:
"Hell for me, no embracing any more!
I am God's, I love God, God — whose knees I clasp,
Whose utterly most just award I take,
But bear no more love-making devils: hence!"
I may have made an effort to reach her side
From where I stood i' the doorway, — anyhow
I found the arms, I wanted, pinioned fast,
Was powerless in the clutch to left and right
O' the rabble pouring in, rascality
Enlisted, rampant on the side of hearth,
Home and the husband, — pay in prospect too!
They heaped themselves upon me. "Ha! — and him
Also you outrage? Him, too, my sole friend,
Guardian and savior? That I balk you of,
Since — see how God can help at last and worst!"
She sprang at the sword that hung beside him, seized,
Drew, brandished it, the sunrise burned for joy
O' the blade, "Die," cried she, "devil, in God's name!"
Ah, but they all closed round her, twelve to one
— The unmanly men, no woman-mother made,
Spawned somehow! Dead-white and disarmed she lay.
No matter for the sword, her word sufficed
To spike the coward through and through: he shook,
Could only spit between the teeth — "You see?
You hear? Bear witness, then! Write down . . . but no —
Carry these criminals to the prison-house,
For first thing! I begin my search meanwhile
After the stolen effects, gold, jewels, plate,
Money and clothes, they robbed me of and fled,

With no few amorous pieces, verse and prose,
I have much reason to expect to find."

When I saw that — no more than the first mad speech,
Made out the speaker mad and a laughing-stock,
So neither did this next device explode
One listener's indignation, — that a scribe
Did sit down; set himself to write indeed,
While sundry knaves began to peer and pry
In corner and hole, — that Guido, wiping brow
And getting him a countenance, was fast
Losing his fear, beginning to strut free
O' the stage of his exploit, snuff here, sniff there, —
Then I took truth in, guessed sufficiently
The service for the moment. "What I say,
Slight at your peril! We are aliens here,
My adversary and I, called noble both;
I am the nobler, and a name men know.
I could refer our cause to our own court
In our own country, but prefer appeal
To the nearer jurisdiction. Being a priest,
Though in a secular garb, — for reasons good
I shall adduce in due time to my peers, —
I demand that the Church I serve, decide
Between us, right the slandered lady there.
A Tuscan noble, I might claim the Duke:
A priest, I rather choose the Church, — bid Rome
Cover the wronged with her inviolate shield."

There was no refusing this: they bore me off,
They bore her off, to separate cells o' the same
Ignoble prison, and, separate, thence to Rome.
Pompilia's face, then and thus, looked on me
The last time in this life: not one sight since,
Never another sight to be! And yet
I thought I had saved her. I appealed to Rome:
It seems I simply sent her to her death.
You tell me she is dying now, or dead;
I cannot bring myself to quite believe
This is a place you torture people in:
What if this your intelligence were just
A subtlety, an honest wile to work
On a man at unawares? 'T were worthy you.
No, Sirs, I cannot have the lady dead!
That erect form, flashing brow, fulgurant eye,
That voice immortal (oh, that voice of hers!)

That vision in the blood-red daybreak — that
Leap to life of the pale electric sword
Angels go armed with, — that was not the last
O' the lady! Come, I see through it, you find —
Know the manœuvre! Also herself said
I had saved her: do you dare say she spoke false?
Let me see for myself if it be so!
Though she were dying, a Priest might be of use,
The more when he's a friend too, — she called me
Far beyond "friend." Come, let me see her — indeed
It is my duty, being a priest: I hope
I stand confessed, established, proved a priest?
My punishment had motive that, a priest
I, in a laic garb, a mundane mode,
Did what were harmlessly done otherwise.
I never touched her with my finger-tip
Except to carry her to the couch, that eve,
Against my heart, beneath my head, bowed low,
As we priests carry the paten: that is why
— To get leave and go see her of your grace —
I have told you this whole story over again.
Do I deserve grace? For I might lock lips,
Laugh at your jurisdiction: what have you
To do with me in the matter? I suppose
You hardly think I donned a bravo's dress
To have a hand in the new crime; on the old,
Judgment's delivered, penalty imposed,
I was chained fast at Civita hand and foot —
She had only you to trust to, you and Rome,
Rome and the Church, and no pert meddling priest
Two days ago, when Guido, with the right,
Hacked her to pieces. One might well be wroth;
I have been patient, done my best to help:
I come from Civita and punishment
As friend of the court — and for pure friendship's sake
Have told my tale to the end, — nay, not the end —
For, wait — I'll end — not leave you that excuse!

When we were parted, — shall I go on there?
I was presently brought to Rome — yes, here I stood
Opposite yonder very crucifix —
And there sat you and you, Sirs, quite the same.
I heard charge, and bore question, and told tale
Noted down in the book there, — turn and see
If, by one jot or tittle, I vary now!
I' the color the tale takes, there's change perhaps;

'T is natural, since the sky is different,
Eclipse in the air now; still, the outline stays.
I showed you how it came to be my part
To save the lady. Then your clerk produced
Papers, a pack of stupid and impure
Banalities called letters about love —
Love, indeed, — I could teach who styled them so,
Better, I think, though priest and loveless both!
"— How was it that a wife, young, innocent,
And stranger to your person, wrote this page?" —
"— She wrote it when the Holy Father wrote
The bestiality that posts through Rome,
Put in his mouth by Pasquin." "Nor perhaps
Did you return these answers, verse and prose,
Signed, sealed and sent the lady? There 's your hand!"
"— This precious piece of verse, I really judge,
Is meant to copy my own character,
A clumsy mimic; and this other prose,
Not so much even; both rank forgery:
Verse, quotha? Bembo's verse! When Saint John wrote
The tract '*De Tribus*,' I wrote this to match."
"— How came it, then, the documents were found
At the inn on your departure?" — "I opine,
Because there were no documents to find
In my presence, — you must hide before you find.
Who forged them hardly practised in my view;
Who found them waited till I turned my back."
"— And what of the clandestine visits paid,
Nocturnal passage in and out the house
With its lord absent? 'T is alleged you climbed" . . .
"— Flew on a broomstick to the man i' the moon!
Who witnessed or will testify this trash?"
"— The trusty servant, Margherita's self,
Even she who brought you letters, you confess,
And, you confess, took letters in reply:
Forget not we have knowledge of the facts!"
"— Sirs, who have knowledge of the facts, defray
The expenditure of wit I waste in vain,
Trying to find out just one fact of all!
She who brought letters from who could not write,
And took back letters to who could not read, —
Who was that messenger, of your charity?"
"— Well, so far favors you the circumstance
That this same messenger . . . how shall we say? . .
Sub imputatione meretricis
Laborat, — which makes accusation null:

We waive this woman's: — nought makes void the next.
Borsi, called Venerino, he who drove,
O' the first night when you fled away, at length
Deposes to your kissings in the coach,
— Frequent, frenetic" . . . "When deposed he so?"
"After some weeks of sharp imprisonment" . . .
"— Granted by friend the Governor, I engage" —
"— For his participation in your flight!
At length his obduracy melting made
The avowal mentioned" . . . "Was dismissed forthwith
To liberty, poor knave, for recompense.
Sirs, give what credit to the lie you can!
For me, no word in my defence I speak,
And God shall argue for the lady!"

So
Did I stand question, and make answer, still
With the same result of smiling disbelief,
Polite impossibility of faith
In such affected virtue in a priest;
But a showing fair play, an indulgence, even,
To one no worse than others after all —
Who had not brought disgrace to the order, played
Discreetly, ruffled gown nor ripped the cloth
In a bungling game at romps: I have told you, Sirs —
If I pretended simply to be pure
Honest and Christian in the case, — absurd!
As well go boast myself above the needs
O' the human nature, careless how meat smells,
Wine tastes, — a saint above the smack! But once
Abate my crest, own flaws i' the flesh, agree
To go with the herd, be hog no more nor less,
Why, hogs in common herd have common rights:
I must not be unduly borne upon,
Who just romanced a little, sowed wild oats,
But 'scaped without a scandal, flagrant fault.
My name helped to a mirthful circumstance:
"Joseph" would do well to amend his plea:
Undoubtedly — some toying with the wife,
But as for ruffian violence and rape,
Potiphar pressed too much on the other side!
The intrigue, the elopement, the disguise, — well charged!
The letters and verse looked hardly like the truth.
Your apprehension was — of guilt enough
To be compatible with innocence,
So, punished best a little and not too much.

Had I struck Guido Franceschini's face,
You had counselled me withdraw for my own sake,
Balk him of bravo-hiring. Friends came round,
Congratulated, "Nobody mistakes!
The pettiness o' the forfeiture defines
The peccadillo: Guido gets his share:
His wife is free of husband and hook-nose,
The mouldy viands and the mother-in-law.
To Civita with you and amuse the time,
Travesty us '*De Raptu Helenæ!*'
A funny figure must the husband cut
When the wife makes him skip,—too ticklish, eh?
Do it in Latin, not the Vulgar, then!
Scazons—we'll copy and send his Eminence.
Mind—one iambus in the final foot!
He'll rectify it, be your friend for life!"
Oh, Sirs, depend on me for much new light
Thrown on the justice and religion here
By this proceeding, much fresh food for thought!

And I was just set down to study these
In relegation, two short days ago,
Admiring how you read the rules, when, clap,
A thunder comes into my solitude—
I am caught up in a whirlwind and cast here,
Told of a sudden, in this room where so late
You dealt out law adroitly, that those scales,
I meekly bowed to, took my allotment from,
Guido has snatched at, broken in your hands,
Metes to himself the murder of his wife,
Full measure, pressed down, running over now!
Can I assist to an explanation?—Yes,
I rise in your esteem, sagacious Sirs,
Stand up a renderer of reasons, not
The officious priest would personate Saint George
For a mock Princess in undragoned days.
What, the blood startles you? What, after all
The priest who needs must carry sword on thigh
May find imperative use for it? Then, there was
A Princess, was a dragon belching flame,
And should have been a Saint George also? Then,
There might be worse schemes than to break the bonds
At Arezzo, lead her by the little hand,
Till she reached Rome, and let her try to live?
But you were law and gospel,—would one please
Stand back, allow your faculty elbow-room?

You blind guides who must needs lead eyes that see!
Fools, alike ignorant of man and God!
What was there here should have perplexed your wit
For a wink of the owl-eyes of you? How miss, then,
What 's now forced on you by this flare of fact —
As if Saint Peter failed to recognize
Nero as no apostle, John or James,
Till some one burned a martyr, made a torch
O' the blood and fat to show his features by!
Could you fail read this cartulary aright
On head and front of Franceschini there,
Large-lettered like hell's masterpiece of print, —
That he, from the beginning pricked at heart
By some lust, letch of hate against his wife,
Plotted to plague her into overt sin
And shame, would slay Pompilia body and soul,
And save his mean self — miserably caught
I' the quagmire of his own tricks, cheats and lies?
— That himself wrote those papers, — from himself
To himself, — which, i' the name of me and her,
His mistress-messenger gave her and me,
Touching us with such pustules of the soul
That she and I might take the taint, be shown
To the world and shuddered over, speckled so?
— That the agent put her sense into my words,
Made substitution of the thing she hoped,
For the thing she had and held, its opposite,
While the husband in the background bit his lips
At each fresh failure of his precious plot?
— That when at the last we did rush each on each,
By no chance but because God willed it so —
The spark of truth was struck from out our souls —
Made all of me, descried in the first glance,
Seem fair and honest and permissible love
O' the good and true — as the first glance told me
There was no duty patent in the world
Like daring try be good and true myself,
Leaving the shows of things to the Lord of Show
And Prince o' the Power of the Air. Our very flight,
Even to its most ambiguous circumstance,
Irrefragably proved how futile, false . . .
Why, men — men and not boys — boys and not babes —
Babes and not beasts — beasts and not stocks and stones! —
Had the liar's lie been true one pin-point speck,
Were I the accepted suitor, free o' the place,
Disposer of the time, to come at a call

And go at a wink as who should say me nay, —
What need of flight, what were the gain therefrom
But just damnation, failure or success?
Damnation pure and simple to her the wife
And me the priest — who bartered private bliss
For public reprobation, the safe shade
For the sunshine which men see to pelt me by:
What other advantage — we who led the days
And nights alone i' the house — was flight to find?
In our whole journey did we stop an hour,
Diverge a foot from strait road till we reached
Or would have reached — but for that fate of ours —
The father and mother, in the eye of Rome,
The eye of yourselves we made aware of us
At the first fall of misfortune? And indeed
You did so far give sanction to our flight,
Confirm its purpose, as lend helping hand,
Deliver up Pompilia not to him
She fled, but those the flight was ventured for.
Why then could you, who stopped short, not go on
One poor step more, and justify the means,
Having allowed the end? — not see and say
"Here's the exceptional conduct that should claim
To be exceptionally judged on rules
Which, understood, make no exception here" —
Why play instead into the devil's hands
By dealing so ambiguously as gave
Guido the power to intervene like me,
Prove one exception more? I saved his wife
Against law: against law he slays her now:
Deal with him!

I have done with being judged.
I stand here guiltless in thought, word and deed,
To the point that I apprise you, — in contempt
For all misapprehending ignorance
O' the human heart, much more the mind of Christ, —
That I assuredly did bow, was blessed
By the revelation of Pompilia. There!
Such is the final fact I fling you, Sirs,
To mouth and mumble and misinterpret: there!
"The priest's in love," have it the vulgar way!
Unpriest me, rend the rags o' the vestment, do —
Degrade deep, disenfranchise all you dare —
Remove me from the midst, no longer priest
And fit companion for the like of you —

Your gay Abati with the well-turned leg
And rose i' the hat-rim, Canons, cross at neck
And silk mask in the pocket of the gown,
Brisk bishops with the world's musk still unbrushed
From the rochet; I 'll no more of these good things:
There 's a crack somewhere, something that 's unsound
I' the rattle!

For Pompilia — be advised,
Build churches, go pray! You will find me there,
I know, if you come, — and you will come, I know.
Why, there 's a Judge weeping! Did not I say
You were good and true at bottom? You see the truth —
I am glad I helped you: she helped me just so.

But for Count Guido, — you must counsel there!
I bow my head, bend to the very dust,
Break myself up in shame of faultiness.
I had him one whole moment, as I said —
As I remember, as will never out
O' the thoughts of me, — I had him in arm's reach
There, — as you stand, Sir, now you cease to sit, —
I could have killed him ere he killed his wife,
And did not: he went off alive and well
And then effected this last feat — through me!
Me — not through you — dismiss that fear! 'T was you
Hindered me staying here to save her, — not
From leaving you and going back to him
And doing service in Arezzo. Come,
Instruct me in procedure! I conceive —
In all due self-abasement might I speak —
How you will deal with Guido: oh, not death!
Death, if it let her life be: otherwise
Not death, — your lights will teach you clearer! I
Certainly have an instinct of my own
I' the matter: bear with me and weigh its worth!
Let us go away — leave Guido all alone
Back on the world again that knows him now!
I think he will be found (indulge so far!)
Not to die so much as slide out of life,
Pushed by the general horror and common hate
Low, lower, — left o' the very ledge of things,
I seem to see him catch convulsively
One by one at all honest forms of life,
At reason, order, decency and use —
To cramp him and get foothold by at least;

And still they disengage them from his clutch.
"What, you are he, then, had Pompilia once
And so forewent her? Take not up with us!"
And thus I see him slowly and surely edged
Off all the table-land whence life upsprings
Aspiring to be immortality,
As the snake, hatched on hill-top by mischance,
Despite his wriggling, slips, slides, slidders down
Hillside, lies low and prostrate on the smooth
Level of the outer place, lapsed in the vale:
So I lose Guido in the loneliness,
Silence and dusk, till at the doleful end,
At the horizontal line, creation's verge,
From what just is to absolute nothingness —
Whom is it, straining onward still, he meets?
What other man deep further in the fate,
Who, turning at the prize of a footfall
To flatter him and promise fellowship,
Discovers in the act a frightful face —
Judas, made monstrous by much solitude!
The two are at one now! Let them love their love
That bites and claws like hate, or hate their hate
That mops and mows and makes as it were love!
There, let them each tear each in devil's-fun,
Or fondle this the other while malice aches —
Both teach, both learn detestability!
Kiss him the kiss, Iscariot! Pay that back,
That smatch o' the slaver blistering on your lip,
By the better trick, the insult he spared Christ —
Lure him the lure o' the letters, Aretine!
Lick him o'er slimy-smooth with jelly-filth
O' the verse-and-prose pollution in love's guise!
The cockatrice is with the basilisk!
There let them grapple, denizens o' the dark,
Foes or friends, but indissolubly bound,
In their one spot out of the ken of God
Or care of man, forever and evermore!

Why, Sirs, what 's this? Why, this is sorry and strange!
Futility, divagation: this from me
Bound to be rational, justify an act
Of sober man! — whereas, being moved so much,
I give you cause to doubt the lady's mind:
A pretty sarcasm for the world! I fear
You do her wit injustice, — all through me!
Like my fate all through, — ineffective help!

A poor rash advocate I prove myself.
You might be angry with good cause: but sure
At the advocate, — only at the undue zeal
That spoils the force of his own plea, I think?
My part was just to tell you how things stand,
State facts and not be flustered at their fume.
But then 't is a priest speaks: as for love, — no!
If you let buzz a vulgar fly like that
About your brains, as if I loved, forsooth,
Indeed, Sirs, you do wrong! We had no thought
Of such infatuation, she and I:
There are many points that prove it: do be just!
I told you, — at one little roadside-place
I spent a good half-hour, paced to and fro
The garden; just to leave her free awhile,
I plucked a handful of Spring herb and bloom:
I might have sat beside her on the bench
Where the children were: I wish the thing had been,
Indeed: the event could not be worse, you know:
One more half-hour of her saved! She 's dead now, Sirs!
While I was running on at such a rate,
Friends should have plucked me by the sleeve: I went
Too much o' the trivial outside of her face
And the purity that shone there — plain to me,
Not to you, what more natural? Nor am I
Infatuated, — oh, I saw, be sure!
Her brow had not the right line, leaned too much,
Painters would say; they like the straight-up Greek:
This seemed bent somewhat with an invisible crown
Of martyr and saint, not such as art approves.
And how the dark orbs dwelt deep underneath,
Looked out of such a sad sweet heaven on me!
The lips, compressed a little, came forward too,
Careful for a whole world of sin and pain.
That was the face, her husband makes his plea,
He sought just to disfigure, — no offence
Beyond that! Sirs, let us be rational!
He needs must vindicate his honor, — ay,
Yet shirks, the coward, in a clown's disguise,
Away from the scene, endeavors to escape.
Now, had he done so, slain and left no trace
O' the slayer, — what were vindicated, pray?
You had found his wife disfigured or a corpse,
For what and by whom? It is too palpable!
Then, here 's another point involving law:
I use this argument to show you meant

No calumny against us by that title
O' the sentence, — liars try to twist it so:
What penalty it bore, I had to pay
Till further proof should follow of innocence —
Probationis ob defectum, — proof?
How could you get proof without trying us?
You went through the preliminary form,
Stopped there, contrived this sentence to amuse
The adversary. If the title ran
For more than fault imputed and not proved,
That was a simple penman's error, else
A slip i' the phrase, — as when we say of you
"Charged with injustice" — which may either be
Or not be, — 't is a name that sticks meanwhile.
Another relevant matter: fool that I am!
Not what I wish true, yet a point friends urge:
It is not true, — yet, since friends think it helps, —
She only tried me when some others failed —
Began with Conti, whom I told you of,
And Guillichini, Guido's kinsfolk both,
And when abandoned by them, not before,
Turned to me. That 's conclusive why she turned.
Much good they got by the happy cowardice!
Conti is dead, poisoned a month ago:
Does that much strike you as a sin? Not much,
After the present murder, — one mark more
On the Moor's skin, — what is black by blacker still?
Conti had come here and told truth. And so
With Guillichini; he 's condemned of course
To the galleys, as a friend in this affair,
Tried and condemned for no one thing i' the world,
A fortnight since by who but the Governor? —
The just judge, who refused Pompilia help
At first blush, being her husband's friend, you know.
There are two tales to suit the separate courts,
Arezzo and Rome: he tells you here, we fled
Alone, unhelped, — lays stress on the main fault,
The spiritual sin, Rome looks to: but elsewhere
He likes best we should break in, steal, bear off,
Be fit to brand and pillory and flog —
That 's the charge goes to the heart of the Governor:
If these unpriest me, you and I may yet
Converse, Vincenzo Marzi-Medici!
Oh, Sirs, there are worse men than you, I say!
More easily duped, I mean; this stupid lie,
Its liar never dared propound in Rome,

He gets Arezzo to receive, — nay more,
Gets Florence and the Duke to authorize!
This is their Rota's sentence, their Granduke
Signs and seals! Rome for me henceforward — Rome,
Where better men are, — most of all, that man
The Augustinian of the Hospital,
Who writes the letter, — he confessed, he says,
Many a dying person, never one
So sweet and true and pure and beautiful.
A good man! Will you make him Pope one day?
Not that he is not good too, this we have —
But old, — else he would have his word to speak,
His truth to teach the world: I thirst for truth,
But shall not drink it till I reach the source.

Sirs, I am quiet again. You see, we are
So very pitiable, she and I,
Who had conceivably been otherwise.
Forget distemperature and idle heat!
Apart from truth's sake, what 's to move so much?
Pompilia will be presently with God;
I am, on earth, as good as out of it,
A relegated priest; when exile ends,
I mean to do my duty and live long.
She and I are mere strangers now: but priests
Should study passion; how else cure mankind,
Who come for help in passionate extremes?
I do but play with an imagined life
Of who, unfettered by a vow, unblessed
By the higher call, — since you will have it so, —
Leads it companioned by the woman there.
To live, and see her learn, and learn by her,
Out of the low obscure and petty world —
Or only see one purpose and one will
Evolve themselves i' the world, change wrong to right:
To have to do with nothing but the true,
The good, the eternal — and these, not alone
In the main current of the general life,
But small experiences of every day,
Concerns of the particular hearth and home:
To learn not only by a comet's rush
But a rose's birth, — not by the grandeur, God —
But the comfort, Christ. All this, how far away!
Mere delectation, meet for a minute's dream! —
Just as a drudging student trims his lamp,
Opens his Plutarch, puts him in the place

Of Roman, Grecian; draws the patched gown close,
Dreams, "Thus should I fight, save or rule the world!"—
Then smilingly, contentedly, awakes
To the old solitary nothingness.
So I, from such communion, pass content . . .

O great, just, good God! Miserable me!

VII.

POMPILIA.

I AM just seventeen years and five months old,
And, if I lived one day more, three full weeks;
'T is writ so in the church's register,
Lorenzo in Lucina, all my names
At length, so many names for one poor child,
— Francesca Camilla Vittoria Angela
Pompilia Comparini, — laughable!
Also 't is writ that I was married there
Four years ago: and they will add, I hope,
When they insert my death, a word or two, —
Omitting all about the mode of death, —
This, in its place, this which one cares to know,
That I had been a mother of a son
Exactly two weeks. It will be through grace
O' the Curate, not through any claim I have;
Because the boy was born at, so baptized
Close to, the Villa, in the proper church:
A pretty church, I say no word against,
Yet stranger-like, — while this Lorenzo seems
My own particular place, I always say.
I used to wonder, when I stood scarce high
As the bed here, what the marble lion meant,
With half his body rushing from the wall,
Eating the figure of a prostrate man —
(To the right, it is, of entry by the door) —
An ominous sign to one baptized like me,
Married, and to be buried there, I hope.
And they should add, to have my life complete,
He is a boy and Gaetan by name —
Gaetano, for a reason, — if the friar
Don Celestine will ask this grace for me
Of Curate Ottoboni: he it was
Baptized me: he remembers my whole life
As I do his gray hair.

All these few things
I know are true, — will you remember them?

Because time flies. The surgeon cared for me,
To count my wounds, — twenty-two dagger-wounds,
Five deadly, but I do not suffer much —
Or too much pain, — and am to die to-night.

Oh how good God is that my babe was born,
— Better than born, baptized and hid away
Before this happened, safe from being hurt!
That had been sin God could not well forgive:
He was too young to smile and save himself.
When they took, two days after he was born,
My babe away from me to be baptized
And hidden awhile, for fear his foe should find, —
The country-woman, used to nursing babes,
Said, "Why take on so? where is the great loss?
These next three weeks he will but sleep and feed,
Only begin to smile at the month's end;
He would not know you, if you kept him here,
Sooner than that; so, spend three merry weeks
Snug in the Villa, getting strong and stout,
And then I bring him back to be your own,
And both of you may steal to — we know where!"
The month — there wants of it two weeks this day!
Still, I half fancied when I heard the knock
At the Villa in the dusk, it might prove she —
Come to say, "Since he smiles before the time,
Why should I cheat you out of one good hour?
Back I have brought him; speak to him and judge!"
Now I shall never see him; what is worse,
When he grows up and gets to be my age,
He will seem hardly more than a great boy;
And if he asks, "What was my mother like?"
People may answer, "Like girls of seventeen" —
And how can he but think of this and that,
Lucias, Marias, Sofias, who titter or blush
When he regards them as such boys may do?
Therefore I wish some one will please to say
I looked already old though I was young;
Do I not . . . say, if you are by to speak . . .
Look nearer twenty? No more like, at least,
Girls who look arch or redden when boys laugh,
Than the poor Virgin that I used to know
At our street-corner in a lonely niche, —
The babe, that sat upon her knees, broke off, —
Thin white glazed clay, you pitied her the more:
She, not the gay ones, always got my rose.

How happy those are who know how to write!
Such could write what their son should read in time,
Had they a whole day to live out like me.
Also my name is not a common name,
"Pompilia," and may help to keep apart
A little the thing I am from what girls are.
But then how far away, how hard to find
Will anything about me have become,
Even if the boy bethink himself and ask!
No father that he ever knew at all,
Nor ever had — no, never had, I say!
That is the truth, — nor any mother left,
Out of the little two weeks that she lived,
Fit for such memory as might assist:
As good too as no family, no name,
Not even poor old Pietro's name, nor hers,
Poor kind unwise Violante, since it seems
They must not be my parents any more.
That is why something put it in my head
To call the boy "Gaetano" — no old name
For sorrow's sake; I looked up to the sky
And took a new saint to begin anew.
One who has only been made saint — how long?
Twenty-five years: so, carefuller, perhaps,
To guard a namesake than those old saints grow,
Tired out by this time, — see my own five saints!

On second thoughts, I hope he will regard
The history of me as what some one dreamed,
And get to disbelieve it at the last:
Since to myself it dwindles fast to that,
Sheer dreaming and impossibility, —
Just in four days too! All the seventeen years,
Not once did a suspicion visit me
How very different a lot is mine
From any other woman's in the world.
The reason must be, 't was by step and step
It got to grow so terrible and strange.
These strange woes stole on tiptoe, as it were,
Into my neighborhood and privacy,
Sat down where I sat, laid them where I lay;
And I was found familiarized with fear,
When friends broke in, held up a torch and cried,
"Why, you Pompilia in the cavern thus,
How comes that arm of yours about a wolf?
And the soft length, — lies in and out your feet

And laps you round the knee, — a snake it is!"
And so on.

Well, and they are right enough,
By the torch they hold up now: for first, observe,
I never had a father, — no, nor yet
A mother: my own boy can say at least,
"I had a mother whom I kept two weeks!"
Not I, who little used to doubt . . . *I* doubt
Good Pietro, kind Violante, gave me birth?
They loved me always as I love my babe
(— Nearly so, that is — quite so could not be —)
Did for me all I meant to do for him,
Till one surprising day, three years ago,
They both declared, at Rome, before some judge
In some court where the people flocked to hear,
That really I had never been their child,
Was a mere castaway, the careless crime
Of an unknown man, the crime and care too much
Of a woman known too well, — little to these,
Therefore, of whom I was the flesh and blood:
What then to Pietro and Violante, both
No more my relatives than you or you?
Nothing to them! You know what they declared.

So with my husband, — just such a surprise,
Such a mistake, in that relationship!
Every one says that husbands love their wives,
Guard them and guide them, give them happiness;
'T is duty, law, pleasure, religion: well,
You see how much of this comes true in mine!
People indeed would fain have somehow proved
He was no husband: but he did not hear,
Or would not wait, and so has killed us all.
Then there is . . . only let me name one more!
There is the friend, — men will not ask about,
But tell untruths of, and give nicknames to,
And think my lover, most surprise of all!
Do only hear, it is the priest they mean,
Giuseppe Caponsacchi: a priest — love,
And love me! Well, yet people think he did.
I am married, he has taken priestly vows,
They know that, and yet go on, say, the same,
"Yes, how he loves you!" "That was love" — they say,
When anything is answered that they ask:
Or else "No wonder you love him" — they say.

Then they shake heads, pity much, scarcely blame —
As if we neither of us lacked excuse,
And anyhow are punished to the full,
And downright love atones for everything!
Nay, I heard read out in the public court
Before the judge, in presence of my friends,
Letters 't was said the priest had sent to me,
And other letters sent him by myself,
We being lovers!

Listen what this is like!
When I was a mere child, my mother . . . that 's
Violante, you must let me call her so,
Nor waste time, trying to unlearn the word, . . .
She brought a neighbor's child of my own age
To play with me of rainy afternoons;
And, since there hung a tapestry on the wall,
We two agreed to find each other out
Among the figures. "Tisbe, that is you,
With half-moon on your hair-knot, spear in hand,
Flying, but no wings, only the great scarf
Blown to a bluish rainbow at your back:
Call off your hound and leave the stag alone!"
"— And there are you, Pompilia, such green leaves
Flourishing out of your five finger-ends,
And all the rest of you so brown and rough:
Why is it you are turned a sort of tree?"
You know the figures never were ourselves
Though we nicknamed them so. Thus, all my life, —
As well what was, as what, like this, was not, —
Looks old, fantastic and impossible:
I touch a fairy thing that fades and fades.
— Even to my babe! I thought, when he was born,
Something began for once that would not end,
Nor change into a laugh at me, but stay
Forevermore, eternally quite mine.
Well, so he is, — but yet they bore him off,
The third day, lest my husband should lay traps
And catch him, and by means of him catch me.
Since they have saved him so, it was well done:
Yet thence comes such confusion of what was
With what will be, — that late seems long ago,
And, what years should bring round, already come,
Till even he withdraws into a dream
As the rest do: I fancy him grown great,
Strong, stern, a tall young man who tutors me,
Frowns with the others, "Poor imprudent child!

Why did you venture out of the safe street?
Why go so far from help to that lone house?
Why open at the whisper and the knock?"

Six days ago when it was New Year's day,
We bent above the fire and talked of him,
What he should do when he was grown and great.
Violante, Pietro, each had given the arm
I leant on, to walk by, from couch to chair
And fireside, — laughed, as I lay safe at last,
"Pompilia's march from bed to board is made,
Pompilia back again and with a babe,
Shall one day lend his arm and help her walk!"
Then we all wished each other more New Years.
Pietro began to scheme — "Our cause is gained;
The law is stronger than a wicked man:
Let him henceforth go his way, leave us ours!
We will avoid the city, tempt no more
The greedy ones by feasting and parade, —
Live at the other villa, we know where,
Still farther off, and we can watch the babe
Grow fast in the good air; and wood is cheap
And wine sincere outside the city gate.
I still have two or three old friends will grope
Their way along the mere half-mile of road,
With staff and lantern on a moonless night
When one needs talk: they'll find me, never fear,
And I'll find them a flask of the old sort yet!"
Violante said, "You chatter like a crow:
Pompilia tires o' the tattle, and shall to bed:
Do not too much the first day, — somewhat more
To-morrow, and, the next, begin the cape
And hood and coat! I have spun wool enough."
Oh what a happy friendly eve was that!

And, next day, about noon, out Pietro went —
He was so happy and would talk so much,
Until Violante pushed and laughed him forth
Sight-seeing in the cold, — "So much to see
I' the churches! Swathe your throat three times!" she cried,
"And, above all, beware the slippery ways,
And bring us all the news by supper-time!"
He came back late, laid by cloak, staff and hat,
Powdered so thick with snow it made us laugh,
Rolled a great log upon the ash o' the hearth,

And bade Violante treat us to a flask,
Because he had obeyed her faithfully,
Gone sight-see through the seven, and found no church
To his mind like San Giovanni — "There 's the fold,
And all the sheep together, big as cats!
And such a shepherd, half the size of life,
Starts up and hears the angel" — when, at the door,
A tap: we started up: you know the rest.

Pietro at least had done no harm, I know;
Nor even Violante, so much harm as makes
Such revenge lawful. Certainly she erred —
Did wrong, how shall I dare say otherwise? —
In telling that first falsehood, buying me
From my poor faulty mother at a price,
To pass off upon Pietro as his child.
If one should take my babe, give him a name,
Say he was not Gaetano and my own,
But that some other woman made his mouth
And hands and feet, — how very false were that!
No good could come of that; and all harm did.
Yet if a stranger were to represent
"Needs must you either give your babe to me
And let me call him mine forevermore,
Or let your husband get him" — ah, my God,
That were a trial I refuse to face!
Well, just so here: it proved wrong but seemed right
To poor Violante — for there lay, she said,
My poor real dying mother in her rags,
Who put me from her with the life and all,
Poverty, pain, shame and disease at once,
To die the easier by what price I fetched —
Also (I hope) because I should be spared
Sorrow and sin, — why may not that have helped?
My father, — he was no one, any one, —
The worse, the likelier, — call him, — he who came,
Was wicked for his pleasure, went his way,
And left no trace to track by; there remained
Nothing but me, the unnecessary life,
To catch up or let fall, — and yet a thing
She could make happy, be made happy with,
This poor Violante, — who would frown thereat?

Well, God, you see! God plants us where we grow.
It is not that, because a bud is born
At a wild brier's end, full i' the wild beast's way,

We ought to pluck and put it out of reach
On the oak-tree top, — say, "There the bud belongs!"
She thought, moreover, real lies were lies told
For harm's sake; whereas this had good at heart,
Good for my mother, good for me, and good
For Pietro who was meant to love a babe,
And needed one to make his life of use,
Receive his house and land when he should die.
Wrong, wrong, and always wrong! how plainly wrong!
For see, this fault kept pricking, as faults do,
All the same at her heart: this falsehood hatched,
She could not let it go nor keep it fast.
She told me so, — the first time I was found
Locked in her arms once more after the pain,
When the nuns let me leave them and go home,
And both of us cried all the cares away, —
This it was set her on to make amends,
This brought about the marriage — simply this!
Do let me speak for her you blame so much!
When Paul, my husband's brother, found me out,
Heard there was wealth for who should marry me,
So, came and made a speech to ask my hand
For Guido, — she, instead of piercing straight
Through the pretence to the ignoble truth,
Fancied she saw God's very finger point,
Designate just the time for planting me
(The wild-brier slip she plucked to love and wear)
In soil where I could strike real root, and grow,
And get to be the thing I called myself:
For, wife and husband are one flesh, God says,
And I, whose parents seemed such and were none,
Should in a husband have a husband now,
Find nothing, this time, but was what it seemed,
— All truth and no confusion any more.
I know she meant all good to me, all pain
To herself, — since how could it be aught but pain,
To give me up, so, from her very breast,
The wilding flower-tree-branch that, all those years,
She had got used to feel for and find fixed?
She meant well: has it been so ill i' the main?
That is but fair to ask: one cannot judge
Of what has been the ill or well of life,
The day that one is dying, — sorrows change
Into not altogether sorrow-like;
I do see strangeness but scarce misery,
Now it is over, and no danger more.

My child is safe; there seems not so much pain.
It comes, most like, that I am just absolved,
Purged of the past, the foul in me, washed fair, —
One cannot both have and not have, you know, —
Being right now, I am happy and color things.
Yes, everybody that leaves life sees all
Softened and bettered: so with other sights:
To me at least was never evening yet
But seemed far beautifuller than its day,
For past is past.

There was a fancy came,
When somewhere, in the journey with my friend,
We stepped into a hovel to get food;
And there began a yelp here, a bark there, —
Misunderstanding creatures that were wroth
And vexed themselves and us till we retired.
The hovel is life: no matter what dogs bit
Or cats scratched in the hovel I break from,
All outside is lone field, moon and such peace —
Flowing in, filling up as with a sea
Whereon comes Someone, walks fast on the white,
Jesus Christ's self, Don Celestine declares,
To meet me and calm all things back again.

Beside, up to my marriage, thirteen years
Were, each day, happy as the day was long:
This may have made the change too terrible.
I know that when Violante told me first
The cavalier — she meant to bring next morn,
Whom I must also let take, kiss my hand —
Would be at San Lorenzo the same eve
And marry me, — which over, we should go
Home both of us without him as before,
And, till she bade speak, I must hold my tongue,
Such being the correct way with girl-brides,
From whom one word would make a father blush, —
I know, I say, that when she told me this,
— Well, I no more saw sense in what she said
Than a lamb does in people clipping wool;
Only lay down and let myself be clipped.
And when next day the cavalier who came
(Tisbe had told me that the slim young man
With wings at head, and wings at feet, and sword
Threatening a monster, in our tapestry,
Would eat a girl else, — was a cavalier) —

When he proved Guido Franceschini, — old
And nothing like so tall as I myself,
Hook-nosed and yellow in a bush of beard,
Much like a thing I saw on a boy's wrist,
He called an owl and used for catching birds, —
And when he took my hand and made a smile —
Why, the uncomfortableness of it all
Seemed hardly more important in the case
Than — when one gives you, say, a coin to spend —
Its newness or its oldness; if the piece
Weigh properly and buy you what you wish,
No matter whether you get grime or glare!
Men take the coin, return you grapes and figs.
Here, marriage was the coin, a dirty piece
Would purchase me the praise of those I loved:
About what else should I concern myself?

So, hardly knowing what a husband meant,
I supposed this or any man would serve,
No whit the worse for being so uncouth:
For I was ill once and a doctor came
With a great ugly hat, no plume thereto,
Black jerkin and black buckles and black sword,
And white sharp beard over the ruff in front,
And oh so lean, so sour-faced and austere! —
Who felt my pulse, made me put out my tongue,
Then oped a phial, dripped a drop or two
Of a black bitter something, — I was cured!
What mattered the fierce beard or the grim face?
It was the physic beautified the man,
Master Malpichi, — never met his match
In Rome, they said, — so ugly all the same!

However, I was hurried through a storm,
Next dark eve of December's deadest day —
How it rained! — through our street and the Lion's-mouth
And the bit of Corso, — cloaked round, covered close,
I was like something strange or contraband, —
Into blank San Lorenzo, up the aisle,
My mother keeping hold of me so tight,
I fancied we were come to see a corpse
Before the altar which she pulled me toward.
There we found waiting an unpleasant priest
Who proved the brother, not our parish friend,
But one with mischief-making mouth and eye,
Paul, whom I know since to my cost. And then

I heard the heavy church-door lock out help
Behind us: for the customary warmth,
Two tapers shivered on the altar. "Quick —
Lose no time!" cried the priest. And straightway down
From . . . what 's behind the altar where he hid —
Hawk-nose and yellowness and bush and all,
Stepped Guido, caught my hand, and there was I
O' the chancel, and the priest had opened book,
Read here and there, made me say that and this,
And after, told me I was now a wife,
Honored indeed, since Christ thus weds the Church,
And therefore turned he water into wine,
To show I should obey my spouse like Christ.
Then the two slipped aside and talked apart,
And I, silent and scared, got down again
And joined my mother, who was weeping now.
Nobody seemed to mind us any more,
And both of us on tiptoe found our way
To the door which was unlocked by this, and wide.
When we were in the street, the rain had stopped,
All things looked better. At our own house-door,
Violante whispered, "No one syllable
To Pietro! Girl-brides never breathe a word!"
"— Well treated to a wetting, draggle-tails!"
Laughed Pietro as he opened — "Very near
You made me brave the gutter's roaring sea
To carry off from roost old dove and young,
Trussed up in church, the cote, by me, the kite!
What do these priests mean, praying folk to death
On stormy afternoons, with Christmas close
To wash our sins off nor require the rain?"
Violante gave my hand a timely squeeze,
Madonna saved me from immodest speech,
I kissed him and was quiet, being a bride.

When I saw nothing more, the next three weeks,
Of Guido — "Nor the Church sees Christ" thought I:
"Nothing is changed however, wine is wine
And water only water in our house.
Nor did I see that ugly doctor since
That cure of the illness: just as I was cured,
I am married, — neither scarecrow will return."

Three weeks, I chuckled — "How would Giulia stare,
And Tecla smile and Tisbe laugh outright,
Were it not impudent for brides to talk!" —

Until one morning, as I sat and sang
At the broidery-frame alone i' the chamber, — loud
Voices, two, three together, sobbings too,
And my name, "Guido," "Paolo," flung like stones
From each to the other! In I ran to see.
There stood the very Guido and the priest
With sly face, — formal but nowise afraid, —
While Pietro seemed all red and angry, scarce
Able to stutter out his wrath in words;
And this it was that made my mother sob,
As he reproached her — "You have murdered us,
Me and yourself and this our child beside!"
Then Guido interposed, "Murdered or not,
Be it enough your child is now my wife!
I claim and come to take her." Paul put in,
"Consider — kinsman, dare I term you so? —
What is the good of your sagacity
Except to counsel in a strait like this?
I guarantee the parties man and wife
Whether you like or loathe it, bless or ban.
May spilt milk be put back within the bowl —
The done thing, undone? You, it is, we look
For counsel to, you fitliest will advise!
Since milk, though spilt and spoilt, does marble good,
Better we down on knees and scrub the floor,
Than sigh, 'the waste would make a syllabub!'
Help us so turn disaster to account,
So predispose the groom, he needs shall grace
The bride with favor from the very first,
Not begin marriage an embittered man!"
He smiled, — the game so wholly in his hands!
While fast and faster sobbed Violante — "Ay,
All of us murdered, past averting now!
O my sin, O my secret!" and such like.

Then I began to half surmise the truth;
Something had happened, low, mean, underhand,
False, and my mother was to blame, and I
To pity, whom all spoke of, none addressed:
I was the chattel that had caused a crime.
I stood mute, — those who tangled must untie
The embroilment. Pietro cried, "Withdraw, my child!
She is not helpful to the sacrifice
At this stage, — do you want the victim by
While you discuss the value of her blood?
For her sake, I consent to hear you talk:
Go, child, and pray God help the innocent!"

I did go and was praying God, when came
Violante, with eyes swollen and red enough,
But movement on her mouth for make-believe
Matters were somehow getting right again.
She bade me sit down by her side and hear.
"You are too young and cannot understand,
Nor did your father understand at first.
I wished to benefit all three of us,
And when he failed to take my meaning, — why,
I tried to have my way at unaware —
Obtained him the advantage he refused.
As if I put before him wholesome food
Instead of broken victual, — he finds change
I' the viands, never cares to reason why,
But falls to blaming me, would fling the plate
From window, scandalize the neighborhood,
Even while he smacks his lips, — men's way, my child!
But either you have prayed him unperverse
Or I have talked him back into his wits:
And Paolo was a help in time of need, —
Guido, not much — my child, the way of men!
A priest is more a woman than a man,
And Paul did wonders to persuade. In short,
Yes, he was wrong, your father sees and says;
My scheme was worth attempting: and bears fruit,
Gives you a husband and a noble name,
A palace and no end of pleasant things.
What do you care about a handsome youth?
They are so volatile, and tease their wives!
This is the kind of man to keep the house.
We lose no daughter, — gain a son, that 's all:
For 't is arranged we never separate,
Nor miss, in our gray time of life, the tints
Of you that color eve to match with morn.
In good or ill, we share and share alike,
And cast our lots into a common lap,
And all three die together as we lived!
Only, at Arezzo, — that 's a Tuscan town,
Not so large as this noisy Rome, no doubt,
But older far and finer much, say folk, —
In a great palace where you will be queen,
Know the Archbishop and the Governor,
And we see homage done you ere we die.
Therefore, be good and pardon!" — "Pardon what?
You know things, I am very ignorant:
All is right if you only will not cry!"

And so an end! Because a blank begins
From when, at the word, she kissed me hard and hot,
And took me back to where my father leaned
Opposite Guido — who stood eying him,
As eyes the butcher the cast panting ox
That feels his fate is come, nor struggles more, —
While Paul looked archly on, pricked brow at whiles
With the pen-point as to punish triumph there, —
And said, "Count Guido, take your lawful wife
Until death part you!"

All since is one blank,
Over and ended; a terrific dream.
It is the good of dreams — so soon they go!
Wake in a horror of heart-beats, you may —
Cry, "The dread thing will never from my thoughts!"
Still, a few daylight doses of plain life,
Cock-crow and sparrow-chirp, or bleat and bell
Of goats that trot by, tinkling, to be milked;
And when you rub your eyes awake and wide,
Where is the harm o' the horror? Gone! So here.
I know I wake, — but from what? Blank, I say!
This is the note of evil: for good lasts.
Even when Don Celestine bade "Search and find!
For your soul's sake, remember what is past,
The better to forgive it," — all in vain!
What was fast getting indistinct before,
Vanished outright. By special grace perhaps,
Between that first calm and this last, four years
Vanish, — one quarter of my life, you know.
I am held up, amid the nothingness,
By one or two truths only — thence I hang,
And there I live, — the rest is death or dream,
All but those points of my support. I think
Of what I saw at Rome once in the Square
O' the Spaniards, opposite the Spanish House:
There was a foreigner had trained a goat,
A shuddering white woman of a beast,
To climb up, stand straight on a pile of sticks
Put close, which gave the creature room enough:
When she was settled there, he, one by one,
Took away all the sticks, left just the four
Whereon the little hoofs did really rest,
There she kept firm, all underneath was air.
So, what I hold by, are my prayer to God,
My hope, that came in answer to the prayer,

Some hand would interpose and save me — hand
Which proved to be my friend's hand: and, — blest bliss, —
That fancy which began so faint at first,
That thrill of dawn's suffusion through my dark,
Which I perceive was promise of my child,
The light his unborn face sent long before, —
God's way of breaking the good news to flesh.
That is all left now of those four bad years.
Don Celestine urged, "But remember more!
Other men's faults may help me find your own.
I need the cruelty exposed, explained,
Or how can I advise you to forgive?"
He thought I could not properly forgive
Unless I ceased forgetting, — which is true:
For, bringing back reluctantly to mind
My husband's treatment of me, — by a light
That's later than my lifetime, I review
And comprehend much and imagine more,
And have but little to forgive at last.
For now, — be fair and say, — is it not true
He was ill-used and cheated of his hope
To get enriched by marriage? Marriage gave
Me and no money, broke the compact so:
He had a right to ask me on those terms,
As Pietro and Violante to declare
They would not give me: so the bargain stood:
They broke it, and he felt himself aggrieved,
Became unkind with me to punish them.
They said 't was he began deception first,
Nor, in one point whereto he pledged himself,
Kept promise: what of that, suppose it were?
Echoes die off, scarcely reverberate
Forever, — why should ill keep echoing ill,
And never let our ears have done with noise?
Then my poor parents took the violent way
To thwart him, — he must needs retaliate, — wrong,
Wrong, and all wrong, — better say, all blind!
As I myself was, that is sure, who else
Had understood the mystery: for his wife
Was bound in some sort to help somehow there.
It seems as if I might have interposed,
Blunted the edge of their resentment so,
Since he vexed me because they first vexed him;
"I will entreat them to desist, submit,
Give him the money and be poor in peace, —
Certainly not go tell the world: perhaps
He will grow quiet with his gains."

Yes, say
Something to this effect and you do well!
But then you have to see first: I was blind.
That is the fruit of all such wormy ways,
The indirect, the unapproved of God:
You cannot find their author's end and aim,
Not even to substitute your good for bad,
Your straight for the irregular; you stand
Stupefied, profitless, as cow or sheep
That miss a man's mind; anger him just twice
By trial at repairing the first fault.
Thus, when he blamed me, "You are a coquette,
A lure-owl posturing to attract birds,
You look love-lures at theatre and church,
In walk, at window!" — that, I knew, was false:
But why he charged me falsely, whither sought
To drive me by such charge, — how could I know?
So, unaware, I only made things worse.
I tried to soothe him by abjuring walk,
Window, church, theatre, for good and all,
As if he had been in earnest: that, you know,
Was nothing like the object of his charge.
Yes, when I got my maid to supplicate
The priest, whose name she read when she would read
Those feigned false letters I was forced to hear
Though I could read no word of, — he should cease
Writing, — nay, if he minded prayer of mine,
Cease from so much as even pass the street
Whereon our house looked, — in my ignorance
I was just thwarting Guido's true intent;
Which was, to bring about a wicked change
Of sport to earnest, tempt a thoughtless man
To write indeed, and pass the house, and more,
Till both of us were taken in a crime.
He ought not to have wished me thus act lies,
Simulate folly: but — wrong or right, the wish —
I failed to apprehend its drift. How plain
It follows, — if I fell into such fault,
He also may have overreached the mark,
Made mistake, by perversity of brain,
I' the whole sad strange plot, the grotesque intrigue
To make me and my friend unself ourselves,
Be other man and woman than we were!
Think it out, you who have the time! for me, —
I cannot say less; more I will not say.
Leave it to God to cover and undo!

Only, my dulness should not prove too much!
— Not prove that in a certain other point
Wherein my husband blamed me, — and you blame,
If I interpret smiles and shakes of head, —
I was dull too. Oh, if I dared but speak!
Must I speak? I am blamed that I forewent
A way to make my husband's favor come.
That is true: I was firm, withstood, refused . . .
— Women as you are, how can I find the words?

I felt there was just one thing Guido claimed
I had no right to give nor he to take;
We being in estrangement, soul from soul:
Till, when I sought help, the Archbishop smiled,
Inquiring into privacies of life,
— Said I was blamable — (he stands for God)
Nowise entitled to exemption there.
Then I obeyed, — as surely had obeyed
Were the injunction "Since your husband bids,
Swallow the burning coal he proffers you!"
But I did wrong, and he gave wrong advice
Though he were thrice Archbishop, — that, I know! —
Now I have got to die and see things clear.
Remember I was barely twelve years old —
A child at marriage: I was let alone
For weeks, I told you, lived my child-life still
Even at Arezzo, when I woke and found
First . . . but I need not think of that again —
Over and ended! Try and take the sense
Of what I signify, if it must be so.
After the first, my husband, for hate's sake,
Said one eve, when the simpler cruelty
Seemed somewhat dull at edge and fit to bear,
"We have been man and wife six months almost:
How long is this your comedy to last?
Go this night to my chamber, not your own!"
At which word, I did rush — most true the charge —
And gain the Archbishop's house — he stands for God —
And fall upon my knees and clasp his feet,
Praying him hinder what my estranged soul
Refused to bear, though patient of the rest:
"Place me within a convent," I implored —
"Let me henceforward lead the virgin life
You praise in Her you bid me imitate!"
What did he answer? "Folly of ignorance!
Know, daughter, circumstances make or mar

Virginity, — 't is virtue or 't is vice.
That which was glory in the Mother of God
Had been, for instance, damnable in Eve
Created to be mother of mankind.
Had Eve, in answer to her Maker's speech
'Be fruitful, multiply, replenish earth' —
Pouted 'But I choose rather to remain
Single' — why, she had spared herself forthwith
Further probation by the apple and snake,
Been pushed straight out of Paradise! For see —
If motherhood be qualified impure,
I catch you making God command Eve sin!
— A blasphemy so like these Molinists',
I must suspect you dip into their books."
Then he pursued "'T was in your covenant!"

No! There my husband never used deceit.
He never did by speech nor act imply
"Because of our souls' yearning that we meet
And mix in soul through flesh, which yours and mine
Wear and impress, and make their visible selves,
— All which means, for the love of you and me,
Let us become one flesh, being one soul!"
He only stipulated for the wealth;
Honest so far. But when he spoke as plain —
Dreadfully honest also — "Since our souls
Stand each from each, a whole world's width between,
Give me the fleshly vesture I can reach
And rend and leave just fit for hell to burn!" —
Why, in God's name, for Guido's soul's own sake
Imperilled by polluting mine, — I say,
I did resist; would I had overcome!

My heart died out at the Archbishop's smile;
— It seemed so stale and worn a way o' the world,
As though 't were nature frowning — "Here is Spring,
The sun shines as he shone at Adam's fall,
The earth requires that warmth reach everywhere:
What, must your patch of snow be saved forsooth
Because you rather fancy snow than flowers?"
Something in this style he began with me.
Last he said, savagely for a good man,
"This explains why you call your husband harsh,
Harsh to you, harsh to whom you love. God's Bread!
The poor Count has to manage a mere child
Whose parents leave untaught the simplest things
Their duty was and privilege to teach, —

Goodwives' instruction, gossips' lore: they laugh
And leave the Count the task, — or leave it me!"
Then I resolved to tell a frightful thing.
"I am not ignorant, — know what I say,
Declaring this is sought for hate, not love.
Sir, you may hear things like almighty God.
I tell you that my housemate, yes — the priest
My husband's brother, Canon Girolamo —
Has taught me what depraved and misnamed love
Means, and what outward signs denote the sin,
For he solicits me and says he loves,
The idle young priest with nought else to do.
My husband sees this, knows this, and lets be.
Is it your counsel I bear this beside?"
"— More scandal, and against a priest this time!
What, 't is the Canon now?" — less snappishly —
"Rise up, my child, for such a child you are,
The rod were too advanced a punishment!
Let 's try the honeyed cake. A parable!
'Without a parable spake He not to them.'

There was a ripe round long black toothsome fruit,
Even a flower-fig, the prime boast of May:
And, to the tree, said . . . either the spirit o' the fig,
Or, if we bring in men, the gardener,
Archbishop of the orchard — had I time
To try o' the two which fits in best: indeed
It might be the Creator's self, but then
The tree should bear an apple, I suppose, —
Well, anyhow, one with authority said,
'Ripe fig, burst skin, regale the fig-pecker —
The bird whereof thou art a perquisite!'
'Nay,' with a flounce, replied the restif fig,
'I much prefer to keep my pulp myself:
He may go breakfastless and dinnerless,
Supperless of one crimson seed, for me!'
So, back she flopped into her bunch of leaves.
He flew off, left her, — did the natural lord, —
And lo, three hundred thousand bees and wasps
Found her out, feasted on her to the shuck:
Such gain the fig's that gave its bird no bite!
The moral, — fools elude their proper lot,
Tempt other fools, get ruined all alike.
Therefore go home, embrace your husband quick!
Which if his Canon brother chance to see,
He will the sooner back to book again."

So, home I did go; so, the worst befell:
So, I had proof the Archbishop was just man,
And hardly that, and certainly no more.
For, miserable consequence to me,
My husband's hatred waxed nor waned at all,
His brother's boldness grew effrontery soon,
And my last stay and comfort in myself
Was forced from me: henceforth I looked to God
Only, nor cared my desecrated soul
Should have fair walls, gay windows for the world.
God's glimmer, that came through the ruin-top,
Was witness why all lights were quenched inside:
Henceforth I asked God counsel, not mankind.

So, when I made the effort, freed myself,
They said — "No care to save appearance here!
How cynic, — when, how wanton, were enough!"
— Adding, it all came of my mother's life —
My own real mother, whom I never knew,
Who did wrong (if she needs must have done wrong)
Through being all her life, not my four years,
At mercy of the hateful: every beast
O' the field was wont to break that fountain-fence,
Trample the silver into mud so murk
Heaven could not find itself reflected there.
Now they cry, "Out on her, who, plashy pool,
Bequeathed turbidity and bitterness
To the daughter-stream where Guido dipt and drank!"

Well, since she had to bear this brand — let me!
The rather do I understand her now, —
From my experience of what hate calls love, —
Much love might be in what their love called hate.
If she sold . . . what they call, sold . . . me her child —
I shall believe she hoped in her poor heart
That I at least might try be good and pure,
Begin to live untempted, not go doomed
And done with ere once found in fault, as she.
Oh and, my mother, it all came to this?
Why should I trust those that speak ill of you,
When I mistrust who speaks even well of them?
Why, since all bound to do me good, did harm,
May not you, seeming as you harmed me most,
Have meant to do most good — and feed your child
From bramble-bush, whom not one orchard-tree
But drew bough back from, nor let one fruit fall?

This it was for you sacrificed your babe?
Gained just this, giving your heart's hope away
As I might give mine, loving it as you,
If . . . but that never could be asked of me!

There, enough! I have my support again,
Again the knowledge that my babe was, is,
Will be mine only. Him, by death, I give
Outright to God, without a further care,—
But not to any parent in the world,—
So to be safe: why is it we repine?
What guardianship were safer could we choose?
All human plans and projects come to nought:
My life, and what I know of other lives,
Prove that: no plan nor project! God shall care!

And now you are not tired? How patient then
All of you,—Oh yes, patient this long while
Listening, and understanding, I am sure!
Four days ago, when I was sound and well
And like to live, no one would understand.
People were kind, but smiled, "And what of him,
Your friend, whose tonsure, the rich dark-brown hides?
There, there!—your lover, do we dream he was?
A priest too—never were such naughtiness!
Still, he thinks many a long think, never fear,
After the shy pale lady,—lay so light
For a moment in his arms, the lucky one!"
And so on: wherefore should I blame you much?
So we are made, such difference in minds,
Such difference too in eyes that see the minds!
That man, you misinterpret and misprise—
The glory of his nature, I had thought,
Shot itself out in white light, blazed the truth
Through every atom of his act with me:
Yet where I point you, through the crystal shrine,
Purity in quintessence, one dew-drop,
You all descry a spider in the midst.
One says, "The head of it is plain to see,"
And one, "They are the feet by which I judge,"
All say, "Those films were spun by nothing else."

Then, I must lay my babe away with God,
Nor think of him again for gratitude.
Yes, my last breath shall wholly spend itself
In one attempt more to disperse the stain,

The mist from other breath fond mouths have made,
About a lustrous and pellucid soul:
So that, when I am gone but sorrow stays,
And people need assurance in their doubt
If God yet have a servant, man a friend,
The weak a savior, and the vile a foe, —
Let him be present, by the name invoked,
Giuseppe-Maria Caponsacchi!

There,
Strength comes already with the utterance!
I will remember once more for his sake
The sorrow: for he lives and is belied.
Could he be here, how he would speak for me!

I had been miserable three drear years
In that dread palace and lay passive now,
When I first learned there could be such a man.
Thus it fell: I was at a public play,
In the last days of Carnival last March,
Brought there I knew not why, but now know well.
My husband put me where I sat, in front;
Then crouched down, breathed cold through me from behind,
Stationed i' the shadow, — none in front could see, —
I, it was, faced the stranger-throng beneath,
The crowd with upturned faces, eyes one stare,
Voices one buzz. I looked but to the stage,
Whereon two lovers sang and interchanged
"True life is only love, love only bliss:
I love thee — thee I love!" then they embraced.
I looked thence to the ceiling and the walls, —
Over the crowd, those voices and those eyes, —
My thoughts went through the roof and out, to Rome
On wings of music, waft of measured words, —
Set me down there, a happy child again,
Sure that to-morrow would be festa-day,
Hearing my parents praise past festas more,
And seeing they were old if I was young,
Yet wondering why they still would end discourse
With "We must soon go, you abide your time,
And, — might we haply see the proper friend
Throw his arm over you and make you safe!"

Sudden I saw him; into my lap there fell
A foolish twist of comfits, broke my dream

And brought me from the air and laid me low,
As ruined as the soaring bee that 's reached
(So Pietro told me at the Villa once)
By the dust-handful. There the comfits lay:
I looked to see who flung them, and I faced
This Caponsacchi, looking up in turn.
Ere I could reason out why, I felt sure,
Whoever flung them, his was not the hand, —
Up rose the round face and good-natured grin
Of one who, in effect, had played the prank,
From covert close beside the earnest face, —
Fat waggish Conti, friend of all the world.
He was my husband's cousin, privileged
To throw the thing: the other, silent, grave,
Solemn almost, saw me, as I saw him.

There is a psalm Don Celestine recites,
"Had I a dove's wings, how I fain would flee!"
The psalm runs not "I hope, I pray for wings," —
Not "If wings fall from heaven, I fix them fast," —
Simply "How good it were to fly and rest,
Have hope now, and one day expect content!
How well to do what I shall never do!"
So I said, "Had there been a man like that,
To lift me with his strength out of all strife
Into the calm, how I could fly and rest!
I have a keeper in the garden here
Whose sole employment is to strike me low
If ever I, for solace, seek the sun.
Life means with me successful feigning death,
Lying stone-like, eluding notice so,
Foregoing here the turf and there the sky.
Suppose that man had been instead of this!"

Presently Conti laughed into my ear,
— Had tripped up to the raised place where I sat —
"Cousin, I flung them brutishly and hard!
Because you must be hurt, to look austere
As Caponsacchi yonder, my tall friend
A-gazing now. Ah, Guido, you so close?
Keep on your knees, do! Beg her to forgive!
My cornet battered like a cannon-ball.
Good-bye, I 'm gone!" — nor waited the reply.

That night at supper, out my husband broke,
"Why was that throwing, that buffoonery?

Do you think I am your dupe? What man would dare
Throw comfits in a stranger lady's lap?
'T was knowledge of you bred such insolence
In Caponsacchi; he dared shoot the bolt,
Using that Conti for his stalking-horse.
How could you see him this once and no more,
When he is always haunting hereabout
At the street-corner or the palace-side,
Publishing my shame and your impudence?
You are a wanton, — I a dupe, you think?
O Christ, what hinders that I kill her quick?'
Whereat he drew his sword and feigned a thrust.

All this, now, — being not so strange to me,
Used to such misconception day by day
And broken-in to bear, — I bore, this time,
More quietly than woman should perhaps;
Repeated the mere truth and held my tongue.

Then he said, "Since you play the ignorant,
I shall instruct you. This amour, — commenced
Or finished or midway in act, all 's one, —
'T is the town-talk; so my revenge shall be.
Does he presume because he is a priest?
I warn him that the sword I wear shall pink
His lily-scented cassock through and through,
Next time I catch him underneath your eaves!"
But he had threatened with the sword so oft
And, after all, not kept his promise. All
I said was, "Let God save the innocent!
Moreover, death is far from a bad fate.
I shall go pray for you and me, not him;
And then I look to sleep, come death or, worse,
Life." So, I slept.

There may have elapsed a week,
When Margherita, — called my waiting-maid,
Whom it is said my husband found too fair —
Who stood and heard the charge and the reply,
Who never once would let the matter rest
From that night forward, but rang changes still
On this the thrust and that the shame, and how
Good cause for jealousy cures jealous fools,
And what a paragon was this same priest
She talked about until I stopped my ears, —
She said, "A week is gone; you comb your hair,

Then go mope in a corner, cheek on palm,
Till night comes round again, — so, waste a week
As if your husband menaced you in sport.
Have not I some acquaintance with his tricks?
Oh no, he did not stab the serving-man
Who made and sang the rhymes about me once!
For why? They sent him to the wars next day.
Nor poisoned he the foreigner, my friend,
Who wagered on the whiteness of my breast, —
The swarth skins of our city in dispute:
For, though he paid me proper compliment,
The Count well knew he was besotted with
Somebody else, a skin as black as ink,
(As all the town knew save my foreigner) —
He found and wedded presently, — 'Why need
Better revenge?' — the Count asked. But what's here?
A priest that does not fight, and cannot wed,
Yet must be dealt with! If the Count took fire
For the poor pastime of a minute, — me —
What were the conflagration for yourself,
Countess and lady-wife and all the rest?
The priest will perish; you will grieve too late:
So shall the city-ladies' handsomest
Frankest and liberalest gentleman
Die for you, to appease a scurvy dog
Hanging's too good for. Is there no escape?
Were it not simple Christian charity
To warn the priest be on his guard, — save him
Assured death, save yourself from causing it?
I meet him in the street. Give me a glove,
A ring to show for token! Mum's the word!"

I answered, "If you were, as styled, my maid,
I would command you: as you are, you say,
My husband's intimate, — assist his wife
Who can do nothing but entreat 'Be still!'
Even if you speak truth and a crime is planned,
Leave help to God as I am forced to do!
There is no other help or we should craze,
Seeing such evil with no human cure.
Reflect that God, who makes the storm desist,
Can make an angry violent heart subside.
Why should we venture teach Him governance?
Never address me on this subject more!"

Next night she said, "But I went, all the same,
— Ay, saw your Caponsacchi in his house,

And come back stuffed with news I must outpour.
I told him, 'Sir, my mistress is a stone:
Why should you harm her for no good you get?
For you do harm her — prowl about our place
With the Count never distant half the street,
Lurking at every corner, would you look!
'T is certain she has witched you with a spell.
Are there not other beauties at your beck?
We all know, Donna This and Monna That
Die for a glance of yours, yet here you gaze!
Go make them grateful, leave the stone its cold!'
And he — oh, he turned first white and then red,
And then — 'To her behest I bow myself,
Whom I love with my body and my soul:
Only a word i' the bowing! See, I write
One little word, no harm to see or hear!
Then, fear no further!' This is what he wrote.
I know you cannot read, — therefore, let me!
'*My idol!*'" . . .

But I took it from her hand
And tore it into shreds. "Why, join the rest
Who harm me? Have I ever done you wrong?
People have told me 't is you wrong myself:
Let it suffice I either feel no wrong
Or else forgive it, — yet you turn my foe!
The others hunt me and you throw a noose!"

She muttered, "Have your wilful way!" I slept.

Whereupon . . . no, I leave my husband out!
It is not to do him more hurt, I speak.
Let it suffice, when misery was most,
One day, I swooned and got a respite so.
She stooped as I was slowly coming to,
This Margherita, ever on my trace,
And whispered — "Caponsacchi!"

If I drowned,
But woke afloat i' the wave with upturned eyes,
And found their first sight was a star! I turned —
For the first time, I let her have her will,
Heard passively, — "The imposthume at such head,
One touch, one lancet-puncture would relieve, —
And still no glance the good physician's way
Who rids you of the torment in a trice!

Still he writes letters you refuse to hear.
He may prevent your husband, kill himself,
So desperate and all fordone is he!
Just hear the pretty verse he made to-day!
A sonnet from Mirtillo. '*Peerless fair*. . .'
All poetry is difficult to read,
— The sense of it is, anyhow, he seeks
Leave to contrive you an escape from hell,
And for that purpose asks an interview.
I can write, I can grant it in your name,
Or, what is better, lead you to his house.
Your husband dashes you against the stones;
This man would place each fragment in a shrine:
You hate him, love your husband!"
I returned,
"It is not true I love my husband, — no,
Nor hate this man. I listen while you speak,
— Assured that what you say is false, the same:
Much as when once, to me a little child,
A rough gaunt man in rags, with eyes on fire,
A crowd of boys and idlers at his heels,
Rushed as I crossed the Square, and held my head
In his two hands, 'Here 's she will let me speak!
You little girl, whose eyes do good to mine,
I am the Pope, am Sextus, now the Sixth;
And that Twelfth Innocent, proclaimed to-day,
Is Lucifer disguised in human flesh!
The angels, met in conclave, crowned me!' — thus
He gibbered and I listened; but I knew
All was delusion, ere folk interposed,
'Unfasten him, the maniac!' Thus I know
All your report of Caponsacchi false,
Folly or dreaming; I have seen so much
By that adventure at the spectacle,
The face I fronted that one first, last time:
He would belie it by such words and thoughts.
Therefore while you profess to show him me,
I ever see his own face. Get you gone!"

"— That will I, nor once open mouth again, —
No, by Saint Joseph and the Holy Ghost!
On your head be the damage, so adieu!"

And so more days, more deeds I must forget,
Till . . . what a strange thing now is to declare!
Since I say anything, say all if true!

And how my life seems lengthened as to serve!
It may be idle or inopportune,
But, true? — why, what was all I said but truth,
Even when I found that such as are untrue
Could only take the truth in through a lie?
Now — I am speaking truth to the Truth's self:
God will lend credit to my words this time.

It had got half through April. I arose
One vivid daybreak, — who had gone to bed
In the old way my wont those last three years,
Careless until, the cup drained, I should die.
The last sound in my ear, the over-night,
Had been a something let drop on the sly
In prattle by Margherita, "Soon enough
Gayeties end, now Easter 's past: a week,
And the Archbishop gets him back to Rome, —
Every one leaves the town for Rome, this Spring, —
Even Caponsacchi, out of heart and hope,
Resigns himself and follows with the flock."
I heard this drop and drop like rain outside
Fast-falling through the darkness while she spoke:
So had I heard with like indifference,
"And Michael's pair of wings will arrive first
At Rome, to introduce the company,
And bear him from our picture where he fights
Satan, — expect to have that dragon loose
And never a defender!" — my sole thought
Being still, as night came, "Done, another day!
How good to sleep and so get nearer death!" —
When, what, first thing at daybreak, pierced the sleep
With a summons to me? Up I sprang alive,
Light in me, light without me, everywhere
Change! A broad yellow sunbeam was let fall
From heaven to earth, — a sudden drawbridge lay,
Along which marched a myriad merry motes,
Mocking the flies that crossed them and recrossed
In rival dance, companions new-born too.
On the house-eaves, a dripping shag of weed
Shook diamonds on each dull gray lattice-square,
As first one, then another bird leapt by,
And light was off, and lo was back again,
Always with one voice, — where are two such joys? —
The blessed building-sparrow! I stepped forth,
Stood on the terrace, — o'er the roofs, such sky!
My heart sang, "I too am to go away,

I too have something I must care about,
Carry away with me to Rome, to Rome!
The bird brings hither sticks and hairs and wool,
And nowhere else i' the world; what fly breaks rank,
Falls out of the procession that befits,
From window here to window there, with all
The world to choose, — so well he knows his course?
I have my purpose and my motive too,
My march to Rome, like any bird or fly!
Had I been dead! How right to be alive!
Last night I almost prayed for leave to die,
Wished Guido all his pleasure with the sword
Or the poison, — poison, sword, was but a trick,
Harmless, may God forgive him the poor jest!
My life is charmed, will last till I reach Rome!
Yesterday, but for the sin, — ah, nameless be
The deed I could have dared against myself!
Now — see if I will touch an unripe fruit,
And risk the health I want to have and use!
Not to live, now, would be the wickedness, —
For life means to make haste and go to Rome
And leave Arezzo, leave all woes at once!"

Now, understand here, by no means mistake!
Long ago had I tried to leave that house
When it seemed such procedure would stop sin;
And still failed more the more I tried — at first
The Archbishop, as I told you, — next, our lord
The Governor, — indeed I found my way,
I went to the great palace where he rules,
Though I knew well 't was he who, — when I gave
A jewel or two, themselves had given me,
Back to my parents, — since they wanted bread,
They who had never let me want a nosegay, — he
Spoke of the jail for felons, if they kept
What was first theirs, then mine, so doubly theirs,
Though all the while my husband's most of all!
I knew well who had spoke the word wrought this:
Yet, being in extremity, I fled
To the Governor, as I say, — scarce opened lip
When — the cold cruel snicker close behind —
Guido was on my trace, already there,
Exchanging nod and wink for shrug and smile,
And I — pushed back to him and, for my pains,
Paid with . . . but why remember what is past?
I sought out a poor friar the people call

The Roman, and confessed my sin which came
Of their sin, — that fact could not be repressed, —
The frightfulness of my despair in God:
And feeling, through the grate, his horror shake,
Implored him, "Write for me who cannot write,
Apprise my parents, make them rescue me!
You bid me be courageous and trust God:
Do you in turn dare somewhat, trust and write,
'Dear friends, who used to be my parents once,
And now declare you have no part in me,
This is some riddle I want wit to solve,
Since you must love me with no difference.
Even suppose you altered, — there 's your hate,
To ask for: hate of you two dearest ones
I shall find liker love than love found here,
If husbands love their wives. Take me away
And hate me as you do the gnats and fleas,
Even the scorpions! How I shall rejoice!'
Write that and save me!" And he promised — wrote
Or did not write; things never changed at all:
He was not like the Augustinian here!
Last, in a desperation I appealed
To friends, whoever wished me better days,
To Guillichini, that 's of kin, — "What, I —
Travel to Rome with you? A flying gout
Bids me deny my heart and mind my leg!"
Then I tried Conti, used to brave — laugh back
The louring thunder when his cousin scowled
At me protected by his presence: "You —
Who well know what you cannot save me from, —
Carry me off! What frightens you, a priest?"
He shook his head, looked grave — "Above my strength!
Guido has claws that scratch, shows feline teeth;
A formidabler foe than I dare fret:
Give me a dog to deal with, twice the size!
Of course I am a priest and Canon too,
But . . . by the bye . . . though both, not quite so bold
As he, my fellow-Canon, brother-priest,
The personage in such ill odor here
Because of the reports — pure birth o' the brain!
Our Caponsacchi, he 's your true Saint George
To slay the monster, set the Princess free,
And have the whole High-Altar to himself:
I always think so when I see that piece
I' the Pieve, that 's his church and mine, you know:
Though you drop eyes at mention of his name!"

That name had got to take a half-grotesque
Half-ominous, wholly enigmatic sense,
Like any by-word, broken bit of song
Born with a meaning, changed by mouth and mouth
That mix it in a sneer or smile, as chance
Bids, till it now means nought but ugliness
And perhaps shame.

— All this intends to say,
That, over-night, the notion of escape
Had seemed distemper, dreaming; and the name, —
Not the man, but the name of him, thus made
Into a mockery and disgrace, — why, she
Who uttered it persistently, had laughed,
"I name his name, and there you start and wince
As criminal from the red tongs' touch!" — yet now,
Now, as I stood letting morn bathe me bright,
Choosing which butterfly should bear my news, —
The white, the brown one, or that tinier blue, —
The Margherita, I detested so,
In she came — "The fine day, the good Spring time!
What, up and out at window? That is best.
No thought of Caponsacchi? — who stood there
All night on one leg, like the sentry crane,
Under the pelting of your water-spout —
Looked last look at your lattice ere he leave
Our city, bury his dead hope at Rome.
Ay, go to looking-glass and make you fine,
While he may die ere touch one least loose hair
You drag at with the comb in such a rage!"

I turned — "Tell Caponsacchi he may come!"

"Tell him to come? Ah, but, for charity,
A truce to fooling! Come? What, — come this eve?
Peter and Paul! But I see through the trick!
Yes, come, and take a flower-pot on his head,
Flung from your terrace! No joke, sincere truth?"

How plainly I perceived hell flash and fade
O' the face of her, — the doubt that first paled joy,
Then, final reassurance I indeed
Was caught now, never to be free again!
What did I care? — who felt myself of force
To play with silk, and spurn the horsehair-springe.

"But — do you know that I have bade him come,
And in your own name? I presumed so much,
Knowing the thing you needed in your heart.
But somehow — what had I to show in proof?
He would not come: half-promised, that was all,
And wrote the letters you refused to read.
What is the message that shall move him now?"

"After the Ave Maria, at first dark,
I will be standing on the terrace, say!"
"I would I had a good long lock of hair
Should prove I was not lying! Never mind!"

Off she went — "May he not refuse, that 's all —
Fearing a trick!"

I answered, "He will come."
And, all day, I sent prayer like incense up
To God the strong, God the beneficent,
God ever mindful in all strife and strait,
Who, for our own good, makes the need extreme,
Till at the last He puts forth might and saves.
An old rhyme came into my head and rang
Of how a virgin, for the faith of God,
Hid herself, from the Paynims that pursued,
In a cave's heart; until a thunderstone,
Wrapped in a flame, revealed the couch and prey:
And they laughed — "Thanks to lightning, ours at last!"
And she cried, "Wrath of God, assert His love!
Servant of God, thou fire, befriend His child!"
And lo, the fire she grasped at, fixed its flash,
Lay in her hand a calm cold dreadful sword
She brandished till pursuers strewed the ground,
So did the souls within them die away,
As o'er the prostrate bodies, sworded, safe,
She walked forth to the solitudes and Christ:
So should I grasp the lightning and be saved!

And still, as the day wore, the trouble grew
Whereby I guessed there would be born a star,
Until at an intense throe of the dusk,
I started up, was pushed, I dare to say,
Out on the terrace, leaned and looked at last
Where the deliverer waited me: the same
Silent and solemn face, I first descried
At the spectacle, confronted mine once more.

So was that minute twice vouchsafed me, so
The manhood, wasted then, was still at watch
To save me yet a second time: no change
Here, though all else changed in the changing world!

I spoke on the instant, as my duty bade,
In some such sense as this, whatever the phrase.
"Friend, foolish words were borne from you to me;
Your soul behind them is the pure strong wind,
Not dust and feathers which its breath may bear:
These to the witless seem the wind itself,
Since proving thus the first of it they feel.
If by mischance you blew offence my way,
The straws are dropt, the wind desists no whit,
And how such strays were caught up in the street
And took a motion from you, why inquire?
I speak to the strong soul, no weak disguise.
If it be truth, — why should I doubt it truth? —
You serve God specially, as priests are bound,
And care about me, stranger as I am,
So far as wish my good, — that miracle
I take to intimate He wills you serve
By saving me, — what else can He direct?
Here is the service. Since a long while now,
I am in course of being put to death:
While death concerned nothing but me, I bowed
The head and bade, in heart, my husband strike.
Now I imperil something more, it seems,
Something that 's trulier me than this myself,
Something I trust in God and you to save.
You go to Rome, they tell me: take me there,
Put me back with my people!"

He replied —
The first word I heard ever from his lips,
All himself in it, — an eternity
Of speech, to match the immeasurable depth
O' the soul that then broke silence — "I am yours."

So did the star rise, soon to lead my step,
Lead on, nor pause before it should stand still
Above the House o' the Babe, — my babe to be,
That knew me first and thus made me know him,
That had his right of life and claim on mine,
And would not let me die till he was born,
But pricked me at the heart to save us both,

Saying, "Have you the will? Leave God the way!"
And the way was Caponsacchi — "mine," thank God!
He was mine, he is mine, he will be mine.

No pause i' the leading and the light! I know,
Next night there was a cloud came, and not he:
But I prayed through the darkness till it broke
And let him shine. The second night, he came.

"The plan is rash; the project desperate:
In such a flight needs must I risk your life,
Give food for falsehood, folly or mistake,
Ground for your husband's rancor and revenge" —
So he began again, with the same face.
I felt that, the same loyalty — one star
Turning now red that was so white before —
One service apprehended newly: just
A word of mine and there the white was back!

"No, friend, for you will take me! 'T is yourself
Risk all, not I, — who let you, for I trust
In the compensating great God: enough!
I know you: when is it that you will come?"

"To-morrow at the day's dawn." Then I heard
What I should do: how to prepare for flight
And where to fly.

That night my husband bade,
"— You, whom I loathe, beware you break my sleep
This whole night! Couch beside me like the corpse
I would you were!" The rest you know, I think —
How I found Caponsacchi and escaped.

And this man, men call sinner? Jesus Christ!
Of whom men said, with mouths Thyself mad'st once,
"He hath a devil" — say he was Thy saint,
My Caponsacchi! Shield and show — unshroud
In Thine own time the glory of the soul
If aught obscure, — if ink-spot, from vile pens
Scribbling a charge against him — (I was glad
Then, for the first time, that I could not write) —
Flirted his way, have flecked the blaze!

For me,
'T is otherwise: let men take, sift my thoughts
— Thoughts I throw like the flax for sun to bleach!

I did pray, do pray, in the prayer shall die,
"Oh, to have Caponsacchi for my guide!"
Ever the face upturned to mine, the hand
Holding my hand across the world, — a sense
That reads, as only such can read, the mark
God sets on woman, signifying so
She should — shall peradventure — be divine;
Yet 'ware, the while, how weakness mars the print
And makes confusion, leaves the thing men see,
— Not this man sees, — who from his soul, re-writes
The obliterated charter, — love and strength
Mending what 's marred. "So kneels a votarist,
Weeds some poor waste traditionary plot
Where shrine once was, where temple yet may be,
Purging the place but worshipping the while,
By faith and not by sight, sight clearest so, —
Such way the saints work," — says Don Celestine.
But I, not privileged to see a saint
Of old when such walked earth with crown and palm,
If I call "saint" what saints call something else —
The saints must bear with me, impute the fault
To a soul i' the bud, so starved by ignorance,
Stinted of warmth, it will not blow this year
Nor recognize the orb which Spring-flowers know.
But if meanwhile some insect with a heart
Worth floods of lazy music, spendthrift joy —
Some fire-fly renounced Spring for my dwarfed cup,
Crept close to me, brought lustre for the dark,
Comfort against the cold, — what though excess
Of comfort should miscall the creature — sun?
What did the sun to hinder while harsh hands
Petal by petal, crude and colorless,
Tore me? This one heart gave me all the Spring!

Is all told? There 's the journey: and where 's time
To tell you how that heart burst out in shine?
Yet certain points do press on me too hard.
Each place must have a name, though I forget:
How strange it was — there where the plain begins
And the small river mitigates its flow —
When eve was fading fast, and my soul sank,
And he divined what surge of bitterness,
In overtaking me, would float me back
Whence I was carried by the striding day —
So, — "This gray place was famous once," said he —
And he began that legend of the place

As if in answer to the unspoken fear,
And told me all about a brave man dead,
Which lifted me and let my soul go on!
How did he know too — at that town's approach
By the rock-side — that in coming near the signs
Of life, the house-roofs and the church and tower,
I saw the old boundary and wall o' the world
Rise plain as ever round me, hard and cold,
As if the broken circlet joined again,
Tightened itself about me with no break, —
As if the town would turn Arezzo's self, —
The husband there, — the friends my enemies,
All ranged against me, not an avenue
To try, but would be blocked and drive me back
On him, — this other, . . . oh the heart in that!
Did not he find, bring, put into my arms
A new-born babe? — and I saw faces beam
Of the young mother proud to teach me joy,
And gossips round expecting my surprise
At the sudden hole through earth that lets in heaven.
I could believe himself by his strong will
Had woven around me what I thought the world
We went along in, every circumstance,
Towns, flowers and faces, all things helped so well!
For, through the journey, was it natural
Such comfort should arise from first to last?
As I look back, all is one milky way;
Still bettered more, the more remembered, so
Do new stars bud while I but search for old,
And fill all gaps i' the glory, and grow him —
Him I now see make the shine everywhere.
Even at the last when the bewildered flesh,
The cloud of weariness about my soul
Clogging too heavily, sucked down all sense, —
Still its last voice was, "He will watch and care;
Let the strength go, I am content: he stays!"
I doubt not he did stay and care for all —
From that sick minute when the head swam round,
And the eyes looked their last and died on him,
As in his arms he caught me, and, you say,
Carried me in, that tragical red eve,
And laid me where I next returned to life
In the other red of morning, two red plates
That crushed together, crushed the time between,
And are since then a solid fire to me, —
When in, my dreadful husband and the world

Broke, — and I saw him, master, by hell's right,
And saw my angel helplessly held back
By guards that helped the malice — the lamb prone,
The serpent towering and triumphant — then
Came all the strength back in a sudden swell,
I did for once see right, do right, give tongue
The adequate protest: for a worm must turn
If it would have its wrong observed by God.
I did spring up, attempt to thrust aside
That ice-block 'twixt the sun and me, lay low
The neutralizer of all good and truth.
If I sinned so, — never obey voice more
O' the Just and Terrible, who bids us — "Bear!"
Not — "Stand by, bear to see my angels bear!"
I am clear it was on impulse to serve God
Not save myself, — no — nor my child unborn!
Had I else waited patiently till now? —
Who saw my old kind parents, silly-sooth
And too much trustful, for their worst of faults,
Cheated, browbeaten, stripped and starved, cast out
Into the kennel: I remonstrated,
Then sank to silence, for, — their woes at end,
Themselves gone, — only I was left to plague.
If only I was threatened and belied,
What matter? I could bear it and did bear;
It was a comfort, still one lot for all:
They were not persecuted for my sake
And I, estranged, the single happy one.
But when at last, all by myself I stood
Obeying the clear voice which bade me rise,
Not for my own sake but my babe unborn,
And take the angel's hand was sent to help —
And found the old adversary athwart the path —
Not my hand simply struck from the angel's, but
The very angel's self made foul i' the face
By the fiend who struck there, — that I would not bear,
That only I resisted! So, my first
And last resistance was invincible.
Prayers move God; threats, and nothing else, move men!
I must have prayed a man as he were God
When I implored the Governor to right
My parents' wrongs: the answer was a smile.
The Archbishop, — did I clasp his feet enough,
Hide my face hotly on them, while I told
More than I dared make my own mother know?
The profit was — compassion and a jest.

This time, the foolish prayers were done with, right
Used might, and solemnized the sport at once.
All was against the combat: vantage, mine?
The runaway avowed, the accomplice-wife,
In company with the plan-contriving priest?
Yet, shame thus rank and patent, I struck, bare,
At foe from head to foot in magic mail,
And off it withered, cobweb-armory
Against the lightning! 'T was truth singed the lies
And saved me, not the vain sword nor weak speech!

You see, I will not have the service fail!
I say, the angel saved me: I am safe!
Others may want and wish, I wish nor want
One point o' the circle plainer, where I stand
Traced round about with white to front the world.
What of the calumny I came across,
What o' the way to the end?—the end crowns all.
The judges judged aright i' the main, gave me
The uttermost of my heart's desire, a truce
From torture and Arezzo, balm for hurt,
With the quiet nuns,—God recompense the good!
Who said and sang away the ugly past.
And, when my final fortune was revealed,
What safety, while, amid my parents' arms,
My babe was given me! Yes, he saved my babe:
It would not have peeped forth, the bird-like thing,
Through that Arezzo noise and trouble: back
Had it returned nor ever let me see!
But the sweet peace cured all, and let me live
And give my bird the life among the leaves
God meant him! Weeks and months of quietude,
I could lie in such peace and learn so much—
Begin the task, I see how needful now,
Of understanding somewhat of my past,—
Know life a little, I should leave so soon.
Therefore, because this man restored my soul,
All has been right; I have gained my gain, enjoyed
As well as suffered,—nay, got foretaste too
Of better life beginning where this ends—
All through the breathing-while allowed me thus,
Which let good premonitions reach my soul
Unthwarted, and benignant influence flow
And interpenetrate and change my heart,
Uncrossed by what was wicked,—nay, unkind.
For, as the weakness of my time drew nigh,

Nobody did me one disservice more,
Spoke coldly or looked strangely, broke the love
I lay in the arms of, till my boy was born,
Born all in love, with nought to spoil the bliss
A whole long fortnight: in a life like mine
A fortnight filled with bliss is long and much.
All women are not mothers of a boy,
Though they live twice the length of my whole life,
And, as they fancy, happily all the same.
There I lay, then, all my great fortnight long,
As if it would continue, broaden out
Happily more and more, and lead to heaven:
Christmas before me, — was not that a chance?
I never realized God's birth before —
How He grew likest God in being born.
This time I felt like Mary, had my babe
Lying a little on my breast like hers.
So all went on till, just four days ago —
The night and the tap.

O it shall be success
To the whole of our poor family! My friends
. . . Nay, father and mother, — give me back my word!
They have been rudely stripped of life, disgraced
Like children who must needs go clothed too fine,
Carry the garb of Carnival in Lent.
If they too much affected frippery,
They have been punished and submit themselves,
Say no word: all is over, they see God
Who will not be extreme to mark their fault
Or He had granted respite: they are safe.

For that most woful man my husband once,
Who, needing respite, still draws vital breath,
I — pardon him? So far as lies in me,
I give him for his good the life he takes,
Praying the world will therefore acquiesce.
Let him make God amends, — none, none to me
Who thank him rather that, whereas strange fate
Mockingly styled him husband and me wife,
Himself this way at least pronounced divorce,
Blotted the marriage-bond: this blood of mine
Flies forth exultingly at any door,
Washes the parchment white, and thanks the blow.
We shall not meet in this world nor the next,
But where will God be absent? In His face

Is light, but in His shadow healing too:
Let Guido touch the shadow and be healed!
And as my presence was importunate, —
My earthly good, temptation and a snare, —
Nothing about me but drew somehow down
His hate upon me, — somewhat so excused
Therefore, since hate was thus the truth of him, —
May my evanishment forevermore
Help further to relieve the heart that cast
Such object of its natural loathing forth!
So he was made; he nowise made himself:
I could not love him, but his mother did.
His soul has never lain beside my soul;
But for the unresisting body, — thanks!
He burned that garment spotted by the flesh.
Whatever he touched is rightly ruined: plague
It caught, and disinfection it had craved
Still but for Guido; I am saved through him
So as by fire; to him — thanks and farewell!

Even for my babe, my boy, there 's safety thence —
From the sudden death of me, I mean: we poor
Weak souls, how we endeavor to be strong!
I was already using up my life, —
This portion, now, should do him such a good,
This other go to keep off such an ill!
The great life; see, a breath and it is gone!
So is detached, so left all by itself
The little life, the fact which means so much.
Shall not God stoop the kindlier to His work,
His marvel of creation, foot would crush,
Now that the hand He trusted to receive
And hold it, lets the treasure fall perforce?
The better; He shall have in orphanage
His own way all the clearlier: if my babe
Outlived the hour — and he has lived two weeks —
It is through God who knows I am not by.
Who is it makes the soft gold hair turn black,
And sets the tongue, might lie so long at rest,
Trying to talk? Let us leave God alone!
Why should I doubt He will explain in time
What I feel now, but fail to find the words?
My babe nor was, nor is, nor yet shall be
Count Guido Franceschini's child at all —
Only his mother's, born of love not hate!
So shall I have my rights in after-time.

It seems absurd, impossible to-day;
So seems so much else, not explained but known!

Ah! Friends, I thank and bless you every one!
No more now: I withdraw from earth and man
To my own soul, compose myself for God.

Well, and there is more! Yes, my end of breath
Shall bear away my soul in being true!
He is still here, not outside with the world,
Here, here, I have him in his rightful place!
'T is now, when I am most upon the move,
I feel for what I verily find — again
The face, again the eyes, again, through all,
The heart and its immeasurable love
Of my one friend, my only, all my own,
Who put his breast between the spears and me.
Ever with Caponsacchi! Otherwise
Here alone would be failure, loss to me —
How much more loss to him, with life debarred
From giving life, love locked from love's display,
The day-star stopped its task that makes night morn!
O lover of my life, O soldier-saint,
No work begun shall ever pause for death!
Love will be helpful to me more and more
I' the coming course, the new path I must tread —
My weak hand in thy strong hand, strong for that!
Tell him that if I seem without him now,
That 's the world's insight! Oh, he understands!
He is at Civita — do I once doubt
The world again is holding us apart?
He had been here, displayed in my behalf
The broad brow that reverberates the truth,
And flashed the word God gave him, back to man!
I know where the free soul is flown! My fate
Will have been hard for even him to bear:
Let it confirm him in the trust of God,
Showing how holily he dared the deed!
And, for the rest, — say, from the deed, no touch
Of harm came, but all good, all happiness,
Not one faint fleck of failure! Why explain?
What I see, oh, he sees and how much more!
Tell him, — I know not wherefore the true word
Should fade and fall unuttered at the last —
It was the name of him I sprang to meet
When came the knock, the summons and the end.

"My great heart, my strong hand are back again!"
I would have sprung to these, beckoning across
Murder and hell gigantic and distinct
O' the threshold, posted to exclude me heaven:
He is ordained to call and I to come!
Do not the dead wear flowers when dressed for God?
Say, — I am all in flowers from head to foot!
Say, — not one flower of all he said and did,
Might seem to flit unnoticed, fade unknown,
But dropped a seed, has grown a balsam-tree
Whereof the blossoming perfumes the place
At this supreme of moments! He is a priest;
He cannot marry therefore, which is right:
I think he would not marry if he could.
Marriage on earth seems such a counterfeit,
Mere imitation of the inimitable:
In heaven we have the real and true and sure.
'T is there they neither marry nor are given
In marriage but are as the angels: right,
Oh how right that is, how like Jesus Christ
To say that! Marriage-making for the earth,
With gold so much, — birth, power, repute so much,
Or beauty, youth so much, in lack of these!
Be as the angels rather, who, apart,
Know themselves into one, are found at length
Married, but marry never, no, nor give
In marriage; they are man and wife at once
When the true time is: here we have to wait
Not so long neither! Could we by a wish
Have what we will and get the future now,
Would we wish aught done undone in the past?
So, let him wait God's instant men call years;
Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul,
Do out the duty! Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of His light
For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise.

VIII.

DOMINUS HYACINTHUS DE ARCHANGELIS,

PAUPERUM PROCURATOR.

Ah, my Giacinto, he 's no ruddy rogue,
Is not Cinone? What, to-day we 're eight?
Seven and one 's eight, I hope, old curly-pate!
— Branches me out his verb-tree on the slate,
Amo –as –avi –atum –are –ans,
Up to *–aturus*, person, tense, and mood,
Quies me cum subjunctivo (I could cry)
And chews Corderius with his morning crust!
Look eight years onward, and he 's perched, he 's perched
Dapper and deft on stool beside this chair,
Cinozzo, Cinoncello, who but he?
— Trying his milk-teeth on some crusty case
Like this, papa shall triturate full soon
To smooth Papinianian pulp!
It trots
Already through my head, though noon be now,
Does supper-time and what belongs to eve.
Dispose, O Don, o' the day, first work then play!
— The proverb bids. And "then" means, won't we hold
Our little yearly lovesome frolic feast,
Cinuolo's birth-night, Cinicello's own,
That makes gruff January grin perforce!
For too contagious grows the mirth, the warmth
Escaping from so many hearts at once —
When the good wife, buxom and bonny yet,
Jokes the hale grandsire, — such are just the sort
To go off suddenly, — he who hides the key
O' the box beneath his pillow every night, —
Which box may hold a parchment (some one thinks)
Will show a scribbled something like a name
"Cinino, Ciniccino," near the end,
"To whom I give and I bequeath my lands,
Estates, tenements, hereditaments,
When I decease as honest grandsire ought."

Wherefore — yet this one time again perhaps —
Sha'n't my Orvieto fuddle his old nose!
Then, uncles, one or the other, well i' the world,
May — drop in, merely? — trudge through rain and wind,
Rather! The smell-feasts rouse them at the hint
There 's cookery in a certain dwelling-place!
Gossips, too, each with keepsake in his poke,
Will pick the way, thrid lane by lantern-light,
And so find door, put galligaskin off
At entry of a decent domicile
Cornered in snug Condotti, — all for love,
All to crush cup with Cinucciatolo!
Well,
Let others climb the heights o' the court, the camp!
How vain are chambering and wantonness,
Revel and rout and pleasures that make mad!
Commend me to home-joy, the family board,
Altar and hearth! These, with a brisk career,
A source of honest profit and good fame,
Just so much work as keeps the brain from rust,
Just so much play as lets the heart expand,
Honoring God and serving man, — I say,
These are reality, and all else, — fluff,
Nutshell and nought, — thank Flaccus for the phrase!
Suppose I had been Fisc, yet bachelor!

Why, work with a will, then! Wherefore lazy now?
Turn up the hour-glass, whence no sand-grain slips
But should have done its duty to the saint
O' the day, the son and heir that 's eight years old!
Let law come dimple Cinoncino's cheek,
And Latin dumple Cinarello's chin,
The while we spread him fine and toss him flat
This pulp that makes the pancake, trim our mass
Of matter into Argument the First,
Prime Pleading in defence of our accused,
Which, once a-waft on paper wing, shall soar,
Shall signalize before applausive Rome
What study, and mayhap some mother-wit,
Can do toward making Master fop and Fisc
Old bachelor Bottinius bite his thumb.
Now, how good God is! How falls plumb to point
This murder, gives me Guido to defend
Now, of all days i' the year, just when the boy
Verges on Virgil, reaches the right age
For some such illustration from his sire,

Stimulus to himself! One might wait years
And never find the chance which now finds me!
The fact is, there 's a blessing on the hearth,
A special providence for fatherhood!
Here 's a man, and what 's more, a noble, kills
— Not sneakingly but almost with parade —
Wife's father and wife's mother and wife's self
That 's mother's self of son and heir (like mine!)
— And here stand I, the favored advocate,
Who pluck this flower o' the field, no Solomon
Was ever clothed in glorious gold to match,
And set the same in Cinoncino's cap!
I defend Guido and his comrades — I!
Pray God, I keep me humble: not to me —
Non nobis, Domine, sed tibi laus!
How the fop chuckled when they made him Fisc!
We 'll beat you, my Bottinius, all for love,
All for our tribute to Cinotto's day!
Why, 'sbuddikins, old Innocent himself
May rub his eyes at the bustle, — ask "What 's this
Rolling from out the rostrum, as a gust
O' the *Pro Milone* had been prisoned there,
And rattled Rome awake?" Awaken Rome,
How can the Pope doze on in decency?
He needs must wake up also, speak his word,
Have his opinion like the rest of Rome,
About this huge, this hurly-burly case:
He wants who can excogitate the truth,
Give the result in speech, plain black and white,
To mumble in the mouth and make his own
— A little changed, good man, a little changed!
No matter, so his gratitude be moved,
By when my Giacintino gets of age,
Mindful of who thus helped him at a pinch,
Archangelus *Procurator Pauperum* —
And proved Hortensius *Redivivus!*
Whew!
To earn the *Est-est*, merit the minced herb
That mollifies the liver's leathery slice,
With here a goose-foot, there a cock's-comb stuck,
Cemented in an element of cheese!
I doubt if dainties do the grandsire good:
Last June he had a sort of strangling . . . bah!
He 's his own master, and his will is made.
So, liver fizz, law flit and Latin fly
As we rub hands o'er dish by way of grace!

May I lose cause if I vent one word more
Except — with fresh-cut quill we ink the white —
P-r-o-pro Guidone et Sociis. There!

Count Guido married — or, in Latin due,
What? *Duxit in uxorem?* — commonplace!
Tædas jugales iniit, subiit, — ha!
He underwent the matrimonial torch?
Connubio stabili sibi junxit, — hum!
In stable bond of marriage bound his own?
That 's clear of any modern taint: and yet . . .

Virgil is little help to who writes prose.
He shall attack me Terence with the dawn,
Shall Cinuccino! Mum, mind business, Sir!
Thus circumstantially evolve we facts,
Ita se habet ideo series facti:
He wedded, — ah, with owls for augury!
Nupserat, heu sinistris avibus,
One of the blood Arezzo boasts her best,
Dominus Guido, nobili genere ortus,
Pompiliæ . . .

But the version afterward!
Curb we this ardor! Notes alone, to-day,
The speech to-morrow, and the Latin last:
Such was the rule in Farinacci's time.
Indeed I hitched it into verse and good.
Unluckily, law quite absorbs a man,
Or else I think I too had poetized.
"Law is the pork substratum of the fry,
Goose-foot and cock's-comb are Latinity," —
And in this case, if circumstance assist,
We 'll garnish law with idiom, never fear!
Out-of-the-way events extend our scope:
For instance, when Bottini brings his charge,
"That letter which you say Pompilia wrote,
To criminate her parents and herself
And disengage her husband from the coil, —
That, Guido Franceschini wrote, say we:
Because Pompilia could nor read nor write,
Therefore he pencilled her such letter first,
Then made her trace in ink the same again."
— Ha, my Bottini, have I thee on hip?
How will he turn this and break Tully's pate?
"*Existimandum*" (don't I hear the dog!)

"*Quod Guido designaverit elementa*
Dictæ epistolæ, quæ fuerint
(*Superinducto ab ea calamo*)
Notata atramento" — there 's a style! —
"*Quia ipsa scribere nesciebat.*" Boh!
Now, my turn! Either, *Insulse!* (I outburst)
Stupidly put! Inane is the response,
Inanis est responsio, or the like —
To wit, that each of all those characters,
Quod singula elementa epistolæ,
Had first of all been traced for her by him,
Fuerant per eum prius designata,
And then, the ink applied a-top of that,
Et deinde, superinducto calamo,
The piece, she says, became her handiwork,
Per eam, efformata, ut ipsa asserit.
Inane were such response! (a second time:)
Her husband outlined her the whole, forsooth?
Vir ejus lineabat epistolam?
What, she confesses that she wrote the thing,
Fatetur eam scripsisse, (scorn that scathes!)
That she might pay obedience to her lord?
Ut viro obtemperaret, apices
(Here repeat charge with proper varied phrase)
Eo designante, ipsaque calamum
Super inducente? By such argument,
Ita pariter, she seeks to show the same,
(Ay, by Saint Joseph and what saints you please)
Epistolam ostendit, medius fidius,
No voluntary deed but fruit of force!
Non voluntarie sed coacte scriptam!
That 's the way to write Latin, friend my Fisc!
Bottini is a beast, one barbarous:
Look out for him when he attempts to say
"Armed with a pistol, Guido followed her!"
Will not I be beforehand with my Fisc,
Cut away phrase by phrase from underfoot!
Guido Pompiliam — Guido thus his wife
Following with igneous engine, shall I have?
Armis munitus igneis persequens —
Arma sulphurea gestans, sulphury arms,
Or, might one style a pistol — popping-piece?
Armatus breviori sclopulo?
We 'll let him have been armed so, though it make
Somewhat against us: I had thought to own —
Provided with a simple travelling-sword,

Ense solummodo viatorio
Instructus : but we 'll grant the pistol here :
Better we lost the cause than lacked the gird
At the Fisc's Latin, lost the Judge's laugh !
It 's Venturini that decides for style.
Tommati rather goes upon the law.
So, as to law, —

Ah, but with law ne'er hope
To level the fellow, — don't I know his trick !
How he draws up, ducks under, twists aside !
He 's a lean-gutted hectic rascal, fine
As pale-haired red-eyed ferret which pretends
'T is ermine, pure soft snow from tail to snout.
He eludes law by piteous looks aloft,
Lets Latin glance off as he makes appeal
To saint that 's somewhere in the ceiling-top
Do you suppose I don't conceive the beast ?
Plague of the ermine-vermin ! For it takes,
It takes, and here 's the fellow Fisc, you see,
And Judge, you 'll not be long in seeing next !
Confound the fop — he 's now at work like me :
Enter his study, as I seem to do,
Hear him read out his writing to himself !
I know he writes as if he spoke : I hear
The hoarse shrill throat, see shut eyes, neck shot-forth,
— I see him strain on tiptoe, soar and pour
Eloquence out, nor stay nor stint at all —
Perorate in the air, then quick to press
With the product ! What abuse of type and sheet !
He 'll keep clear of my cast, my logic-throw,
Let argument slide, and then deliver swift
Some bowl from quite an unguessed point of stand —
Having the luck o' the last word, the reply !
A plaguy cast, a mortifying stroke :
You face a fellow — cries, " So, there you stand ?
But I discourteous jump clean o'er your head !
You take ship-carpentry for pilotage,
Stop rat-holes, while a sea sweeps through the breach, —
Hammer and fortify at puny points ?
Do, clamp and tenon, make all tight and safe !
'T is here and here and here you ship a sea,
No good of your stopped leaks and littleness ! "

Yet what do I name " little and a leak " ?
The main defence o' the murder 's used to death,

By this time, dry bare bones, no scrap we pick:
Safer I worked the new, the unforeseen,
The nice by-stroke, the fine and improvised
Point that can titillate the brain o' the Bench
Torpid with over-teaching, long ago!
As if Tommati (that has heard, reheard
And heard again, first this side and then that —
Guido and Pietro, Pietro and Guido, din
And deafen, full three years, at each long ear)
Don't want amusement for instruction now,
Won't rather feel a flea run o'er his ribs,
Than a daw settle heavily on his head!
Oh, I was young and had the trick of fence,
Knew subtle pass and push with careless right —
My left arm ever quiet behind back,
With dagger ready: not both hands to blade!
Puff and blow, put the strength out, Blunderbore!
There 's my subordinate, young Spreti, now,
Pedant and prig, — he 'll pant away at proof,
That 's his way!

Now for mine — to rub some life
Into one's choppy fingers this cold day!
I trust Cinuzzo ties on tippet, guards
The precious throat on which so much depends!
Guido must be all goose-flesh in his hole,
Despite the prison-straw: bad Carnival
For captives! no sliced fry for him, poor Count!

Carnival-time, — another providence!
The town a-swarm with strangers to amuse,
To edify, to give one's name and fame
In charge of, till they find, some future day,
Cintino come and claim it, his name too,
Pledge of the pleasantness they owe papa —
Who else was it cured Rome of her great qualms,
When she must needs have her own judgment? — ay,
When all her topping wits had set to work,
Pronounced already on the case: mere boys,
Twice Cineruggiolo's age with half his sense,
As good as tell me, when I cross the court,
"Master Arcangeli!" (plucking at my gown)
"We can predict, we comprehend your play,
We 'll help you save your client." Tra-la-la!
I 've travelled ground, from childhood to this hour,
To have the town anticipate my track?

The old fox takes the plain and velvet path,
The young hound's predilection, — prints the dew,
Don't he, to suit their pulpy pads of paw ?
No! Burying nose deep down i' the briery bush,
Thus I defend Count Guido.
Where are we weak ?
First, which is foremost in advantage too,
Our murder, — we call, killing, — is a fact
Confessed, defended, made a boast of : good!
To think the Fisc claimed use of torture here,
And got thereby avowal plump and plain
That gives me just the chance I wanted, — scope
Not for brute-force but ingenuity,
Explaining matters, not denying them!
One may dispute, — as I am bound to do,
And shall, — validity of process here :
Inasmuch as a noble is exempt
From torture which plebeians undergo
In such a case: for law is lenient, lax,
Remits the torture to a nobleman
Unless suspicion be of twice the strength
Attaches to a man born vulgarly:
We don't card silk with comb that dresses wool.
Moreover, 't was severity undue
In this case, even had the lord been lout.
What utters, on this head, our oracle,
Our Farinacci, my Gamaliel erst,
In those immortal "Questions"? This I quote:
"Of all the tools at Law's disposal, sure
That named *Vigiliarum* is the best —
That is, the worst — to whoso needs must bear:
Lasting, as it may do, from some seven hours
To ten; (beyond ten, we 've no precedent;
Certain have touched their ten but, bah, they died!)
It does so efficaciously convince,
That — speaking by much observation here —
Out of each hundred cases, by my count,
Never I knew of patients beyond four
Withstand its taste, or less than ninety-six
End by succumbing: only martyrs four,
Of obstinate silence, guilty or no, — against
Ninety-six full confessors, innocent
Or otherwise, — so shrewd a tool have we!"
No marvel either: in unwary hands,
Death on the spot is no rare consequence:
As indeed all but happened in this case

To one of ourselves, our young tough peasant-friend
The accomplice called Baldeschi: they were rough,
Dosed him with torture as you drench a horse,
Not modify your treatment to a man:
So, two successive days he fainted dead,
And only on the third essay, gave up,
Confessed like flesh and blood. We could reclaim,—
Blockhead Bottini giving cause enough!
But no,—we 'll take it as spontaneously
Confessed: we 'll have the murder beyond doubt.
Ah, fortunate (the poet's word reversed)
Inasmuch as we know our happiness!
Had the antagonist left dubiety,
Here were we proving murder a mere myth,
And Guido innocent, ignorant, absent,—ay,
Absent! He was—why, where should Christian be?—
Engaged in visiting his proper church,
The duty of us all at Christmas-time,
When Caponsacchi, the seducer, stung
To madness by his relegation, cast
About him and contrived a remedy
In murder: since opprobrium broke afresh,
By birth o' the babe, on him the imputed sire,
He it was quietly sought to smother up
His shame and theirs together,—killed the three,
And fled—(go seek him where you please to search)—
Just at the time when Guido, touched by grace,
Devotions ended, hastened to the spot,
Meaning to pardon his convicted wife,
"Neither do I condemn thee, go in peace!"—
And thus arrived i' the nick of time to catch
The charge o' the killing, though great-heartedly
He came but to forgive and bring to life.
Doubt ye the force of Christmas on the soul?
"Is thine eye evil because mine is good?"

So, doubtless, had I needed argue here
But for the full confession round and sound!
Thus might you wrong some kingly alchemist,—
Whose concern should not be with showing brass
Transmuted into gold, but triumphing,
Rather, about his gold changed out of brass,
Not vulgarly to the mere sight and touch,
But in the idea, the spiritual display,
The apparition buoyed by winged words
Hovering above its birthplace in the brain,—

Thus would you wrong this excellent personage
Forced, by the gross need, to gird apron round,
Plant forge, light fire, ply bellows, — in a word,
Demonstrate: when a faulty pipkin's crack
May disconcert you his presumptive truth!
Here were I hanging to the testimony
Of one of these poor rustics — four, ye gods!
Whom the first taste of friend the Fiscal's cord
May drive into undoing my whole speech,
Undoing, on his birthday, — what is worse, —
My son and heir!
I wonder, all the same,
Not so much at those peasants' lack of heart;
But — Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
Bear pain no better! Everybody knows
It used once, when my father was a boy,
To form a proper, nay, important point
I' the education of our well-born youth,
That they took torture handsomely at need,
Without confessing in this clownish guise.
Each noble had his rack for private use,
And would, for the diversion of a guest,
Bid it be set up in the yard of arms,
And take thereon his hour of exercise, —
Command the varletry stretch, strain their best,
While friends looked on, admired my lord could smile
'Mid tugging which had caused an ox to roar.
Men are no longer men!

— And advocates
No longer Farinacci, let us add,
If I one more time fly from point proposed!
So, *Vindicatio*, — here begins the speech! —
Honoris causa; thus we make our stand:
Honor in us had injury, we prove.
Or if we fail to prove such injury
More than misprision of the fact, — what then?
It is enough, authorities declare,
If the result, the deed in question now,
Be caused by confidence that injury
Is veritable and no figment: since,
What, though proved fancy afterward, seemed fact
At the time, they argue shall excuse result.
That which we do, persuaded of good cause
For what we do, hold justifiable! —
So casuists bid: man, bound to do his best,

They would not have him leave that best undone
And mean to do his worst, — though fuller light
Show best was worst and worst would have been best.
Act by the present light! — they ask of man.
Ultra quod hic non agitur, besides
It is not anyway our business here,
De probatione adulterii,
To prove what we thought crime was crime indeed,
Ad irrogandam pœnam, and require
Its punishment: such nowise do we seek:
Sed ad effectum, but 't is our concern,
Excusandi, here to simply find excuse,
Occisorem, for who did the killing-work,
Et ad illius defensionem, (mark
The difference) and defend the man, just that!
Quo casu levior probatio
Exuberaret, to which end far lighter proof
Suffices than the prior case would claim:
It should be always harder to convict,
In short, than to establish innocence.
Therefore we shall demonstrate first of all
That Honor is a gift of God to man
Precious beyond compare: which natural sense
Of human rectitude and purity, —
Which white, man's soul is born with, — brooks no touch:
Therefore, the sensitivest spot of all,
Wounded by any wafture breathed from black,
Is — honor within honor, like the eye
Centred i' the ball — the honor of our wife.
Touch us o' the pupil of our honor, then,
Not actually, — since so you slay outright, —
But by a gesture simulating touch,
Presumable mere menace of such taint, —
This were our warrant for eruptive ire
"To whose dominion I impose no end."

(Virgil, now, should not be too difficult
To Cinoncino, — say, the early books.
Pen, truce to further gambols! *Poscimur!*)

Nor can revenge of injury done here
To the honor proved the life and soul of us,
Be too excessive, too extravagant:
Such wrong seeks and must have complete revenge.
Show we this, first, on the mere natural ground:
Begin at the beginning, and proceed

Incontrovertibly. Theodoric,
In an apt sentence Cassiodorus cites,
Propounds for basis of all household law —
I hardly recollect it, but it ends,
"Bird mates with bird, beast genders with his like,
And brooks no interference." Bird and beast?
The very insects . . . if they wive or no,
How dare I say when Aristotle doubts?
But the presumption is they likewise wive,
At least the nobler sorts; for take the bee
As instance, — copying King Solomon, —
Why that displeasure of the bee to aught
Which savors of incontinency, makes
The unchaste a very horror to the hive?
Whence comes it bees obtain their epithet
Of *castæ apes*, notably "the chaste"?
Because, ingeniously saith Scaliger,
(The young sage, — see his book of Table-talk)
"Such is their hatred of immodest act,
They fall upon the offender, sting to death."
I mind a passage much confirmative
I' the Idyllist (though I read him Latinized) —
"Why," asks a shepherd, "is this bank unfit
For celebration of our vernal loves?"
"Oh swain," returns the instructed shepherdess,
"Bees swarm here, and would quick resent our warmth!"
Only cold-blooded fish lack instinct here,
Nor gain nor guard connubiality:
But beasts, quadrupedal, mammiferous,
Do credit to their beasthood: witness him
That Ælian cites, the noble elephant,
(Or if not Ælian, somebody as sage)
Who seeing, much offence beneath his nose,
His master's friend exceed in courtesy
The due allowance to his master's wife,
Taught them good manners and killed both at once,
Making his master and the world admire.
Indubitably, then, that master's self,
Favored by circumstance, had done the same
Or else stood clear rebuked by his own beast.
Adeo, ut qui honorem spernit, thus,
Who values his own honor not a straw, —
Et non recuperare curat, nor
Labors by might and main to salve its wound,
Se ulciscendo, by revenging him,
Nil differat a belluis, is a brute,

Quinimo irrationabilior
Ipsismet belluis, nay, contrariwise,
Much more irrational than brutes themselves,
Should be considered, *reputetur!* How?
If a poor animal feel honor smart,
Taught by blind instinct nature plants in him,
Shall man, — confessed creation's master-stroke,
Nay, intellectual glory, nay, a god,
Nay, of the nature of my Judges here, —
Shall man prove the insensible, the block,
The blot o' the earth he crawls on to disgrace?
(Come, that 's both solid and poetic!) Man
Derogate, live for the low tastes alone,
Mean creeping cares about the animal life?
Absit such homage to vile flesh and blood!

(May Gigia have remembered, nothing stings
Fried liver out of its monotony
Of richness, like a root of fennel, chopped
Fine with the parsley: parsley-sprigs, I said —
Was there need I should say "and fennel too"?
But no, she cannot have been so obtuse!
To our argument! The fennel will be chopped.)

From beast to man next mount we — ay, but, mind,
Still mere man, not yet Christian, — that, in time!
Not too fast, mark you! 'T is on Heathen grounds
We next defend our act: then, fairly urge —
If this were done of old, in a green tree,
Allowed in the Spring rawness of our kind,
What may be licensed in the Autumn dry
And ripe, the latter harvest-tide of man?
If, with his poor and primitive half-lights,
The Pagan, whom our devils served for gods,
Could stigmatize the breach of marriage-vow
As that which blood, blood only might efface, —
Absolve the husband, outraged, whose revenge
Anticipated law, plied sword himself, —
How with the Christian in full blaze of noon?
Shall not he rather double penalty,
Multiply vengeance, than, degenerate,
Let privilege be minished, droop, decay?
Therefore set forth at large the ancient law!
Superabundant the examples be
To pick and choose from. The Athenian Code,
Solon's, the name is serviceable, — then,

The Laws of the Twelve Tables, that fifteenth, —
"Romulus" likewise rolls out round and large.
The Julian; the Cornelian; Gracchus' Law:
So old a chime, the bells ring of themselves!
Spreti can set that going if he please,
I point you, for my part, the belfry plain,
Intent to rise from dusk, *diluculum*,
Into the Christian day shall broaden next.

First, the fit compliment to His Holiness
Happily reigning: then sustain the point —
All that was long ago declared as law
By the natural revelation, stands confirmed
By Apostle and Evangelist and Saint, —
To wit — that Honor is man's supreme good.
Why should I balk Saint Jerome of his phrase?
Ubi honor non est, where no honor is,
Ibi contemptus est; and where contempt,
Ibi injuria frequens; and where that,
The frequent injury, *ibi et indignatio;*
And where the indignation, *ibi quies*
Nulla: and where there is no quietude,
Why, *ibi*, there, the mind is often cast
Down from the heights where it proposed to dwell,
Mens à proposito sæpe dejicitur.
And naturally the mind is so cast down,
Since harder 't is, *quum difficilius sit*,
Iram cohibere, to coerce one's wrath,
Quam miracula facere, than work miracles, —
So Gregory smiles in his First Dialogue.
Whence we infer, the ingenuous soul, the man
Who makes esteem of honor and repute,
Whenever honor and repute are touched,
Arrives at term of fury and despair,
Loses all guidance from the reason-check:
As in delirium or a frenzy-fit,
Nor fury nor despair he satiates, — no,
Not even if he attain the impossible,
O'erturn the hinges of the universe
To annihilate — not whoso caused the smart
Solely, the author simply of his pain,
But the place, the memory, *vituperii*,
O' the shame and scorn: *quia*, — says Solomon,
(The Holy Spirit speaking by his mouth
In Proverbs, the sixth chapter near the end)
— Because, the zeal and fury of a man,

Zelus et furor viri, will not spare,
Non parcet, in the day of his revenge,
In die vindictæ, nor will acquiesce,
Nec acquiescet, through a person's prayers,
Cujusdam precibus, — nec suscipiet,
Nor yet take, *pro redemptione*, for
Redemption, *dona plurium*, gifts of friends,
Mere money-payment to compound for ache.
Who recognizes not my client's case?
Whereto, as strangely consentaneous here,
Adduce Saint Bernard in the Epistle writ
To Robertulus, his nephew: "Too much grief,
Dolor quippe nimius non deliberat,
Does not excogitate propriety,
Non verecundatur, nor knows shame at all,
Non consulit rationem, nor consults
Reason, *non dignitatis metuit*
Damnum, nor dreads the loss of dignity;
Modum et ordinem, order and the mode,
Ignorat, it ignores:" why, trait for trait,
Was ever portrait limned so like the life?
(By Cavalier Maratta, shall I say?
I hear he 's first in reputation now.)
Yes, that of Samson in the Sacred Text:
That 's not so much the portrait as the man!
Samson in Gaza was the antetype
Of Guido at Rome: observe the Nazarite!
Blinded he was, — an easy thing to bear:
Intrepidly he took imprisonment,
Gyves, stripes, and daily labor at the mill:
But when he found himself, i' the public place,
Destined to make the common people sport,
Disdain burned up with such an impetus
I' the breast of him, that, all the man one fire,
Moriatur, roared he, let my soul's self die,
Anima mea, with the Philistines!
So, pulled down pillar, roof, and death and all,
Multosque plures interfecit, ay,
And many more he killed thus, *moriens*,
Dying, *quam vivus*, than in his whole life,
Occiderat, he ever killed before.
Are these things writ for no example, Sirs?
One instance more, and let me see who doubts!
Our Lord Himself, made all of mansuetude,
Sealing the sum of sufferance up, received
Opprobrium, contumely and buffeting

Without complaint: but when He found Himself
Touched in His honor never so little for once,
Then out broke indignation pent before —
"*Honorem meum nemini dabo!*" "No,
My honor I to nobody will give!"
And certainly the example so hath wrought,
That whosoever, at the proper worth,
Apprises worldly honor and repute,
Esteems it nobler to die honored man
Beneath Mannaia, than live centuries
Disgraced in the eye o' the world. We find Saint Paul
No recreant to this faith delivered once:
"Far worthier were it that I died," cries he,
Expedit mihi magis mori, "than
That any one should make my glory void,"
Quam ut gloriam meam quis evacuet!
See, *ad Corinthienses:* whereupon
Saint Ambrose makes a comment with much fruit,
Doubtless my Judges long since laid to heart,
So I desist from bringing forward here.
(I can't quite recollect it.)

Have I proved
Satis superque, both enough and to spare,
That Revelation old and new admits
The natural man may effervesce in ire,
O'erflood earth, o'erfroth heaven with foamy rage,
At the first puncture to his self-respect?
Then, Sirs, this Christian dogma, this law-bud
Full-blown now, soon to bask the absolute flower
Of Papal doctrine in our blaze of day, —
Bethink you, shall we miss one promise-streak,
One doubtful birth of dawn crepuscular,
One dew-drop comfort to humanity,
Now that the chalice teems with noonday wine?
Yea, argue Molinists who bar revenge —
Referring just to what makes out our case!
Under old dispensation, argue they,
The doom of the adulterous wife was death,
Stoning by Moses' law. "Nay, stone her not,
Put her away!" next legislates our Lord;
And last of all, "Nor yet divorce a wife!"
Ordains the Church, "she typifies ourself,
The Bride no fault shall cause to fall from Christ."
Then, as no jot nor tittle of the Law
Has passed away — which who presumes to doubt?

As not one word of Christ is rendered vain —
Which, could it be though heaven and earth should pass?
— Where do I find my proper punishment
For my adulterous wife, I humbly ask
Of my infallible Pope, — who now remits
Even the divorce allowed by Christ in lieu
Of lapidation Moses licensed me?
The Gospel checks the Law which throws the stone,
The Church tears the divorce-bill Gospel grants:
Shall wives sin and enjoy impunity?
What profits me the fulness of the days,
The final dispensation, I demand,
Unless Law, Gospel, and the Church subjoin,
"But who hath barred thee primitive revenge,
Which, like fire damped and dammed up, burns more fierce?
Use thou thy natural privilege of man,
Else wert thou found like those old ingrate Jews,
Despite the manna-banquet on the board,
A-longing after melons, cucumbers,
And such like trash of Egypt left behind!"

(There was one melon had improved our soup:
But did not Cinoncino need the rind
To make a boat with? So I seem to think.)

Law, Gospel, and the Church — from these we leap
To the very last revealment, easy rule
Befitting the well-born and thorough-bred
O' the happy day we live in, not the dark
O' the early rude and acorn-eating race.
"Behold," quoth James, "we bridle in a horse
And turn his body as we would thereby!"
Yea, but we change the bit to suit the growth,
And rasp our colt's jaw with a rugged spike,
We hasten to remit our managed steed
Who wheels round at persuasion of a touch.
Civilization bows to decency,
The acknowledged use and wont: 't is manners — mild
But yet imperative law — which make the man.
Thus do we pay the proper compliment
To rank, and that society of Rome
Hath so obliged us by its interest,
Taken our client's part instinctively,
As unaware defending its own cause.
What *dictum* doth Society lay down
I' the case of one who hath a faithless wife?

Wherewithal should the husband cleanse his way?
Be patient and forgive? Oh, language fails,—
Shrinks from depicturing his turpitude!
For if wronged husband raise not hue and cry,
Quod si maritus de adulterio non
Conquereretur, he's presumed a—foh!
Presumitur leno: so, complain he must.
But how complain? At your tribunal, lords?
Far weightier challenge suits your sense, I wot!
You sit not to have gentlemen propose
Questions gentility can itself discuss.
Did not you prove that to our brother Paul?
The Abate, *quum judicialiter*
Prosequeretur, when he tried the law,
Guidonis causam, in Count Guido's case,
Accidit ipsi, this befell himself,
Quod risum moverit et cachinnos, that
He moved to mirth and cachinnation, all
Or nearly all, *fere in omnibus*
Etiam sensatis et cordatis, men
Strong-sensed, sound-hearted, nay, the very Court,
Ipsismet in judicibus, I might add,
Non tamen dicam. In a cause like this,
So multiplied were reasons *pro* and *con*,
Delicate, intertwisted and obscure,
That Law refused loan of a finger-tip
To unravel, readjust the hopeless twine,
Since, half-a-dozen steps outside Law's seat,
There stood a foolish trifler with a tool
A-dangle to no purpose by his side,
Had clearly cut the embroilment in a trice.
Asserunt enim unanimiter
Doctores, for the Doctors all assert,
That husbands, *quod mariti*, must be held
Viles, cornuti reputantur, vile,
Fronts branching forth a florid infamy,
Si propriis manibus, if with their own hands,
Non sumunt, they fail straight to take revenge,
Vindictam, but expect the deed be done
By the Court—*expectant illam fieri*
Per judices, qui summopere rident, which
Gives an enormous guffaw for reply,
Et cachinnantur. For he ran away,
Deliquit enim, just that he might 'scape
The censure of both counsellors and crowd,
Ut vulgi et Doctorum evitaret

Censuram, and lest so he superadd
To loss of honor ignominy too,
Et sic ne istam quoque ignominiam
Amisso honori superadderet.
My lords, my lords, the inconsiderate step
Was — we referred ourselves to law at all!
Twit me not with, "Law else had punished you!"
Each punishment of the extra-legal step,
To which the high-born preferably revert,
Is ever for some oversight, some slip
I' the taking vengeance, not for vengeance' self.
A good thing, done unhandsomely, turns ill;
And never yet lacked ill the law's rebuke.
For pregnant instance, let us contemplate
The luck of Leonardus, — see at large
Of Sicily's Decisions sixty-first.
This Leonard finds his wife is false: what then?
He makes her own son snare her, and entice
Out of the town walls to a private walk,
Wherein he slays her with commodity.
They find her body half-devoured by dogs:
Leonard is tried, convicted, punished, sent
To labor in the galleys seven years long:
Why? For the murder? Nay, but for the mode!
Malus modus occidendi, ruled the Court,
An ugly mode of killing, nothing more!
Another fructuous sample, — see "*De Re*
Criminali," in Matthæus' divine piece.
Another husband, in no better plight,
Simulates absence, thereby tempts his wife;
On whom he falls, out of sly ambuscade,
Backed by a brother of his, and both of them
Armed to the teeth with arms that law had blamed.
Nimis dolose, overwilily,
Fuisse operatum, did they work,
Pronounced the law: had all been fairly done
Law had not found him worthy, as she did,
Of four years' exile. Why cite more? Enough
Is good as a feast — (unless a birthday-feast
For one's Cinuccio) so, we finish here.
My lords, we rather need defend ourselves
Inasmuch as, for a twinkling of an eye,
We hesitatingly appealed to law, —
Than need deny that, on mature advice,
We blushingly bethought us, bade revenge
Back to its simple proper private way

Of decent self-dealt gentlemanly death.
Judges, here is the law, and here beside,
The testimony! Look to it!
Pause and breathe!
So far is only too plain; we must watch:
Bottini will scarce hazard an attack
Here: best anticipate the fellow's play,
And guard the weaker places — warily ask,
What if considerations of a sort,
Reasons of a kind, arise from out the strange
Peculiar unforeseen new circumstance
Of this our (candor owns) abnormal act,
To bar the right of us revenging so?
"Impunity were otherwise your meed:
Go slay your wife and welcome," — may be urged, —
"But why the innocent old couple slay,
Pietro, Violante? You may do enough,
Not too much, not exceed the golden mean:
Neither brute-beast nor Pagan, Gentile, Jew,
Nor Christian, no nor votarist of the mode,
Is justified to push revenge so far!"

No, indeed? Why, thou very sciolist!
The actual wrong, Pompilia seemed to do,
Was virtual wrong done by the parents here —
Imposing her upon us as their child —
Themselves allow: then, her fault was their fault,
Her punishment be theirs accordingly!
But wait a little, sneak not off so soon!
Was this cheat solely harm to Guido, pray?
The precious couple you call innocent, —
Why, they were felons that Law failed to clutch,
Qui ut fraudarent, who that they might rob,
Legitime vocatos, folk law called,
Ad fidei commissum, true heirs to the Trust,
Partum supposuerunt, feigned this birth,
Immemores reos factos esse, blind
To the fact that, guilty, they incurred thereby,
Ultimi supplicii, hanging or what's worse.
Do you blame us that we turn Law's instruments,
Not mere self-seekers, — mind the public weal,
Nor make the private good our sole concern?
That having — shall I say — secured a thief,
Not simply we recover from his pouch
The stolen article our property,
But also pounce upon our neighbor's purse

We opportunely find reposing there;
And do him justice while we right ourselves?
He owes us, for our part, a drubbing say,
But owes our neighbor just a dance i' the air
Under the gallows: so, we throttle him.
That neighbor 's Law, that couple are the Thief,
We are the over-ready to help Law —
Zeal of her house hath eaten us up: for which,
Can it be, Law intends to eat up us,
Crudum Priamum, devour poor Priam raw,
('T was Jupiter's own joke,) with babes to boot,
Priamique pisinnos, in Homeric phrase?
Shame! —— and so ends my period prettily.

But even, — prove the pair not culpable,
Free as unborn babe from connivance at,
Participation in, their daughter's fault:
Ours the mistake. Is that a rare event?
Non semel, it is anything but rare,
In contingentia facti, that by chance,
Impunes evaserunt, go scot-free,
Qui, such well-meaning people as ourselves,
Justo dolore moti, who aggrieved
With cause, *apposuerunt manus,* lay
Rough hands, *in innocentes,* on wrong heads.
Cite we an illustrative case in point:
Mulier Smirnea quædam, good my lords,
A gentlewoman lived in Smyrna once,
Virum et filium ex eo conceptum, who
Both husband and her son begot by him,
Killed, *interfecerat, ex quo,* because,
Vir filium suum perdiderat, her spouse
Had been beforehand with her, killed her son,
Matrimonii primi, of a previous bed.
Deinde accusata, then accused,
Apud Dolabellam, before him that sat
Proconsul, *nec duabus cædibus*
Contaminatam liberare, nor
To liberate a woman doubly-dyed
With murder, *voluit,* made he up his mind,
Nec condemnare, nor to doom to death,
Justo dolore impulsam, one impelled
By just grief; *sed remisit,* but sent her up
Ad Areopagum, to the Hill of Mars,
Sapientissimorum judicum
Cœtum, to that assembly of the sage

Paralleled only by my judges here;
Ubi, cognito de causa, where, the cause
Well weighed, *responsum est*, they gave reply,
Ut ipsa et accusator, that both sides
O' the suit, *redirent*, should come back again,
Post centum annos, after a hundred years,
For judgment; *et sic*, by which sage decree,
Duplici parricidio rea, one
Convicted of a double parricide,
Quamvis etiam innocentem, though in truth
Out of the pair, one innocent at least
She, *occidisset*, plainly had put to death,
Undequaque, yet she altogether 'scaped,
Evasit impunis. See the case at length
In Valerius, fittingly styled *Maximus*,
That eighth book of his Memorable Facts.
Nor Cyriacus cites beside the mark:
Similiter uxor quæ mandaverat,
Just so, a lady who had taken care,
Homicidium viri, that her lord be killed,
Ex denegatione debiti,
For denegation of a certain debt,
Matrimonialis, he was loth to pay,
Fuit pecuniaria mulcta, was
Amerced in a pecuniary mulct,
Punita, et ad pœnam, and to pains,
Temporalem, for a certain space of time,
In monasterio, in a convent.

(Ay,
In monasterio! He mismanages
In with the ablative, the accusative!
I had hoped to have hitched the villain into verse
For a gift, this very day, a complete list
O' the prepositions each with proper case,
Telling a story, long was in my head.
What prepositions take the accusative?
Ad, to or at — *who saw the cat?* — down to
Ob, for, because of, *keep her claws off!* Tush!
Law in a man takes the whole liberty:
The muse is fettered: just as Ovid found!)

And now, sea widens and the coast is clear.
What of the dubious act you bade excuse?
Surely things broaden, brighten, till at length
Remains — so far from act that needs defence —

Apology to make for act delayed
One minute, let alone eight mortal months
Of hesitation! "Why procrastinate?"
(Out with it, my Bottinius, ease thyself!)
"Right, promptly done, is twice right: right delayed
Turns wrong. We grant you should have killed your wife,
But killed o' the moment, at the meeting her
In company with the priest: then did the tongue
O' the Brazen Head give license, 'Time is now!'
Wait to make mind up? 'Time is past' it peals.
Friend, you are competent to mastery
O' the passions that confessedly explain
An outbreak: you allow an interval,
And then break out as if time's clock still clanged.
You have forfeited your chance, and flat you fall
Into the commonplace category
Of men bound to go softly all their days,
Obeying law."

Now, which way make response?
What was the answer Guido gave, himself?
— That so to argue came of ignorance
How honor bears a wound: "For, wound," said he,
"My body, and the smart soon mends and ends:
While, wound my soul where honor sits and rules,
Longer the sufferance, stronger grows the pain,
Being *ex incontinenti*, fresh as first."
But try another tack, urge common sense
By way of contrast: say — Too true, my lords!
We did demur, awhile did hesitate:
Since husband sure should let a scruple speak
Ere he slay wife, — for his own safety, lords!
Carpers abound in this misjudging world:
Moreover, there 's a nicety in law
That seems to justify them should they carp.
Suppose the source of injury a son, —
Father may slay such son yet run no risk:
Why graced with such a privilege? Because
A father so incensed with his own child,
Or must have reason, or believe he has:
Quia semper, seeing that in such event,
Presumitur, the law is bound suppose,
Quod capiat pater, that the sire must take,
Bonum consilium pro filio,
The best course as to what befits his boy,
Through instinct, *ex instinctu*, of mere love,
Amoris, and, *paterni*, fatherhood;

Quam confidentiam, which confidence,
Non habet, law declines to entertain,
De viro, of the husband: where finds he
An instinct that compels him love his wife?
Rather is he presumably her foe.
So, let him ponder long in this bad world
Ere do the simplest act of justice.

But
Again — and here we brush Bottini's breast —
Object you, "See the danger of delay!
Suppose a man murdered my friend last month:
Had I come up and killed him for his pains
In rage, I had done right, allows the law:
I meet him now and kill him in cold blood,
I do wrong, equally allows the law:
Wherein do actions differ, yours and mine?"
In plenitudine intellectus es?
Hast thy wits, Fisc? To take such slayer's life,
Returns it life to thy slain friend at all?
Had he stolen ring instead of stabbing friend, —
To-day, to-morrow, or next century,
Meeting the thief, thy ring upon his thumb,
Thou justifiably hadst wrung it thence:
So, couldst thou wrench thy friend's life back again,
Though prisoned in the bosom of his foe,
Why, law would look complacent on thy wrath.
Our case is, that the thing we lost, we found:
The honor, we were robbed of eight months since,
Being recoverable at any day
By death of the delinquent. Go thy ways!
Ere thou hast learned law, will be much to do,
As said the gaby while he shod the goose.

Nay, if you urge me, interval was none!
From the inn to the Villa — blank or else a bar
Of adverse and contrarious incident
Solid between us and our just revenge!
What with the priest who flourishes his blade,
The wife who like a fury flings at us,
The crowd — and then the capture, the appeal
To Rome, the journey there, the jaunting thence
To shelter at the House of Convertites,
The visits to the Villa, and so forth,
Where was one minute left us all this while
To put in execution that revenge

We planned o' the instant? — as it were, plumped down
O' the spot, some eight months since, which round sound egg,
Rome, more propitious than our nest, should hatch!
Object not, "You reached Rome on Christmas-eve,
And, despite liberty to act at once,
Waited a whole and indecorous week!"
Hath so the Molinism, the canker, lords,
Eaten to our bone? Is no religion left?
No care for aught held holy by the Church?
What, would you have us skip and miss those Feasts
O' the Natal Time, must we go prosecute
Secular business on a sacred day?
Should not the merest charity expect,
Setting our poor concerns aside for once,
We hurried to the song matutinal
I' the Sistine, and pressed forward for the Mass
The Cardinal that 's Camerlengo chants,
Then rushed on to the blessing of the Hat
And Rapier, which the Pope sends to what prince
Has done most detriment to the Infidel —
And thereby whetted courage if 't were blunt?
Meantime, allow we kept the house a week,
Suppose not we were idle in our mew!
Picture us raging here and raving there —
"'Money?' I need none. 'Friends?' The word is null.
Restore the white was on that shield of mine
Borne at" . . . wherever might be shield to bear.
"I see my grandsire, he who fought so well
At" . . . here find out and put in time and place,
Or else invent the fight his grandsire fought:
"I see this! I see that!"

(See nothing else,
Or I shall scarce see lamb's fry in an hour!
What to the uncle, as I bid advance
The smoking dish? "Fry suits a tender tooth!
Behoves we care a little for our kin —
You, Sir, — who care so much for cousinship
As come to your poor loving nephew's feast!"
He has the reversion of a long lease yet —
Land to bequeath! He loves lamb's fry, I know!)

Here fall to be considered those same six
Qualities; what Bottini needs must call
So many aggravations of our crime,

Parasite-growth upon mere murder's back.
We summarily might dispose of such
By some off-hand and jaunty fling, some skit —
"So, since there 's proved no crime to aggravate,
A fico for your aggravations, Fisc!"
No, — handle mischief rather, — play with spells
Were meant to raise a spirit, and laugh the while
We show that did he rise we stand his match!
Therefore, first aggravation: we made up —
Over and above our simple murderous selves —
A regular assemblage of armed men,
Coadunatio armatorum, — ay,
Unluckily it was the very judge
That sits in judgment on our cause to-day
Who passed the law as Governor of Rome:
"Four men armed," — though for lawful purpose, mark!
Much more for an acknowledged crime, — "shall die."
We five were armed to the teeth, meant murder too?
Why, that 's the very point that saves us, Fisc!
Let me instruct you. Crime nor done nor meant, —
You punish still who arm and congregate:
For wherefore use bad means to a good end?
Crime being meant not done, — you punish still
The means to crime, whereon you haply pounce,
Though accident have balked them of effect.
But crime not only compassed but complete,
Meant and done too? Why, since you have the end,
Be that your sole concern, nor mind those means
No longer to the purpose! Murdered we?
(— Which, that our luck was in the present case,
Quod contigisse in præsenti casu,
Is palpable, *manibus palpatum est* —)
Make murder out against us, nothing else!
Of many crimes committed with a view
To one main crime, Law overlooks the less,
Intent upon the large. Suppose a man
Having in view commission of a theft,
Climbs the town-wall: 't is for the theft he hangs,
In case he stands convicted of such theft:
Law remits whipping, due to who clomb wall
Through bravery or wantonness alone,
Just to dislodge a daw's nest, plant a flag.
So I interpret you the manly mind
Of him about to judge both you and me, —
Our Governor, who, being no Fisc, my Fisc,
Cannot have blundered on ineptitude!

Next aggravation, — that the arms themselves
Were specially of such forbidden sort
Through shape or length or breadth, as, prompt, Law
plucks
From single hand of solitary man,
Making him pay the carriage with his life:
Delatio armorum, arms against the rule,
Contra formam constitutionis, of
Pope Alexander's blessed memory.
Such are the poniards with the double prong,
Horn-like, when tines make bold the antlered buck,
Each prong of brittle glass — wherewith to stab
And break off short and so let fragment stick
Fast in the flesh to baffle surgery:
Such being the Genoese blade with hooked edge
That did us service at the villa here.
Sed parcat mihi tam eximius vir,
But, — let so rare a personage forgive, —
Fisc, thy objection is a foppery!
Thy charge runs that we killed three innocents:
Killed, dost see? Then, if killed, what matter how? —
By stick or stone, by sword or dagger, tool
Long or tool short, round or triangular —
Poor slain folk find small comfort in the choice!
Means to an end, means to an end, my Fisc!
Nature cries out, "Take the first arms you find!"
Furor ministrat arma: where 's a stone?
Unde mî lapidem, where darts for me?
Unde sagittas? But subdue the bard
And rationalize a little. Eight months since,
Had we, or had we not, incurred your blame
For letting 'scape unpunished this bad pair?
I think I proved that in last paragraph!
Why did we so? Because our courage failed.
Wherefore? Through lack of arms to fight the foe:
We had no arms or merely lawful ones,
An unimportant sword and blunderbuss,
Against a foe, pollent in potency,
The *amasius*, and our vixen of a wife.
Well then, how culpably do we gird loin
And once more undertake the high emprise,
Unless we load ourselves this second time
With handsome superfluity of arms,
Since better is "too much" than "not enough,"
And "*plus non vitiat*," too much does no harm,
Except in mathematics, sages say.

Gather instruction from the parable!
At first we are advised — "A lad hath here
Seven barley loaves and two small fishes: what
Is that among so many?" Aptly asked:
But put that question twice and, quite as apt,
The answer is, "Fragments, twelve baskets full!"

And, while we speak of superabundance, fling
We word by the way to fools who cast their flout
On Guido — "Punishment were pardoned him,
But here the punishment exceeds offence:
He might be just, but he was cruel too!"
Why, grant there seems a kind of cruelty
In downright stabbing people he could maim,
(If so you stigmatize the stern and strict)
Still, Guido meant no cruelty — may plead
Transgression of his mandate, over-zeal
O' the part of his companions: all he craved
Was, they should fray the faces of the folk,
Merely disfigure, nowise make them die.
Solummodo fassus est, he owns no more,
Dedisse mandatum, than that he desired,
Ad sfrisiandum, dicam, that they hack
And hew, i' the customary phrase, his wife,
Uxorem tantum, and no harm beside.
If his instructions then be misconceived,
Nay, disobeyed, impute you blame to him?
Cite me no Panicollus to the point,
As adverse! Oh, I quite expect his case —
How certain noble youths of Sicily
Having good reason to mistrust their wives,
Killed them and were absolved in consequence:
While others who had gone beyond the need
By mutilation of each paramour —
As Galba in the Horatian satire grieved
— These were condemned to the galleys, cast for guilt
Exceeding simple murder of a wife.
But why? Because of ugliness, and not
Cruelty, in the said revenge, I trow!
Ex causa abscissionis partium;
Qui nempe id facientes reputantur
Naturæ inimici, man revolts
Against them as the natural enemy.
Pray, grant to one who meant to slit the nose
And slash the cheek and slur the mouth, at most,
A somewhat more humane award than these

Obtained, these natural enemies of man!
Objectum funditus corruit, flat you fall,
My Fisc! I waste no kick on you, but pass.

Third aggravation: that our act was done —
Not in the public street, where safety lies,
Not in the by-place, caution may avoid,
Wood, cavern, desert, spots contrived for crime, —
But in the very house, home, nook and nest,
O' the victims, murdered in their dwelling-place,
In domo ac habitatione propria,
Where all presumably is peace and joy.
The spider, crime, pronounce we twice a pest
When, creeping from congenial cottage, she
Taketh hold with her hands, to horrify
His household more, i' the palace of the king.
All three were housed and safe and confident.
Moreover, the permission that our wife
Should have at length *domum pro carcere*,
Her own abode in place of prison — why,
We ourselves granted, by our other self
And proxy Paolo: did we make such grant,
Meaning a lure? — elude the vigilance
O' the jailer, lead her to commodious death,
While we ostensibly relented?

Ay,
Just so did we, nor otherwise, my Fisc!
Is vengeance lawful? We demand our right,
But find it will be questioned or refused
By jailer, turnkey, hangdog, — what know we?
Pray, how is it we should conduct ourselves?
To gain our private right — break public peace,
Do you bid us? — trouble order with our broils?
Endanger . . . shall I shrink to own . . . ourselves? —
Who want no broken head nor bloody nose
(While busied slitting noses, breaking heads)
From the first tipstaff that may interfere!
Nam quicquid sit, for howsoever it be,
An de consensu nostro, if with leave
Or not, *a monasterio*, from the nuns,
Educta esset, she had been led forth,
Potuimus id dissimulare, we
May well have granted leave in pure pretence,
Ut aditum habere, that thereby
An entry we might compass, a free move
Potuissemus, to her easy death,

Ad eam occidendam. Privacy
O' the hearth, and sanctitude of home, say you?
Shall we give man's abode more privilege
Than God's? — for in the churches where He dwells,
In quibus assistit Regum Rex, by means
Of His essence, *per essentiam*, all the same,
Et nihilominus, therein, *in eis*,
Ex justa via delinquens, whoso dares
To take a liberty on ground enough,
Is pardoned, *excusatur:* that 's our case —
Delinquent through befitting cause. You hold,
To punish a false wife in her own house
Is graver than, what happens every day,
To hale a debtor from his hiding-place
In church protected by the Sacrament?
To this conclusion have I brought my Fisc?
Foxes have holes, and fowls o' the air their nests;
Praise you the impiety that follows, Fisc?
Shall false wife yet have where to lay her head?
"*Contra Fiscum definitum est!*" He 's done!
"*Surge et scribe*," make a note of it!
— If I may dally with Aquinas' word.

Or in the death-throe does he mutter still,
Fourth aggravation, that we changed our garb,
And rusticized ourselves with uncouth hat,
Rough vest and goatskin wrappage; murdered thus
Mutatione vestium, in disguise,
Whereby mere murder got complexed with wile,
Turned *homicidium ex insidiis?* Fisc,
How often must I round thee in the ears —
All means are lawful to a lawful end?
Concede he had the right to kill his wife:
The Count indulged in a travesty; why?
De illa ut vindictam sumeret,
That on her he might lawful vengeance take,
Commodius, with more ease, *et tutius*,
And safelier: wants he warrant for the step?
Read to thy profit how the Apostle once
For ease and safety, when Damascus raged,
Was let down in a basket by the wall,
To 'scape the malice of the governor
(Another sort of Governor boasts Rome!)
— Many are of opinion, — covered close,
Concealed with — what except that very cloak
He left behind at Troas afterward?
I shall not add a syllable: Molinists may!

Well, have we more to manage? Ay, indeed!
Fifth aggravation, that our wife reposed
Sub potestate judicis, beneath
Protection of the judge, — her house was styled
A prison, and his power became its guard
In lieu of wall and gate and bolt and bar.
This is a tough point, shrewd, redoubtable:
Because we have to supplicate that judge
Shall overlook wrong done the judgment-seat.
Now, I might suffer my own nose be pulled,
As man: but then as father . . . if the Fisc
Touched one hair of my boy who held my hand
In confidence he could not come to harm
Crossing the Corso, at my own desire,
Going to see those bodies in the church —
What would you say to that, Don Hyacinth?
This is the sole and single knotty point:
For, bid Tommati blink his interest,
You laud his magnanimity the while:
But balk Tommati's office, — he talks big!
"My predecessors in the place, — those sons
O' the prophets that may hope succeed me here, —
Shall I diminish their prerogative?
Count Guido Franceschini's honor! — well,
Has the Governor of Rome none?"

You perceive,
The cards are all against us. Make a push,
Kick over table, as shrewd gamesters do!
We, do you say, encroach upon the rights,
Deny the omnipotence o' the Judge forsooth?
We, who have only been from first to last
Intending that his purpose should prevail,
Nay, more, at times, anticipating it
At risk of his rebuke?

But wait awhile!
Cannot we lump this with the sixth and last
Of the aggravations — that the Majesty
O' the Sovereign here received a wound? to wit,
Læsa Majestas, since our violence
Was out of envy to the course of law,
In odium litis? We cut short thereby
Three pending suits, promoted by ourselves
I' the main, — which worsens crime, *accedit ad*
Exasperationem criminis!

Yes, here the eruptive wrath with full effect!
How, did not indignation chain my tongue,
Could I repel this last, worst charge of all!
(There is a porcupine to barbecue;
Gigia can jug a rabbit well enough,
With sour-sweet sauce and pine-pips; but, good Lord,
Suppose the devil instigate the wench
To stew, not roast him? Stew my porcupine?
If she does, I know where his quills shall stick!
Come, I must go myself and see to things:
I cannot stay much longer stewing here.)
Our stomach . . . I mean, our soul is stirred within,
And we want words. We wounded Majesty?
Fall under such a censure, we? — who yearned
So much that Majesty dispel the cloud
And shine on us with healing on her wings,
That we prayed Pope *Majestas*' very self
To anticipate a little the tardy pack,
Bell us forth deep the authoritative bay
Should start the beagles into sudden yelp
Unisonous, — and, Gospel leading Law,
Grant there assemble in our own behoof
A Congregation, a particular Court,
A few picked friends of quality and place,
To hear the several matters in dispute,
Causes big, little, and indifferent,
Bred of our marriage like a mushroom-growth,
All at once (can one brush off such too soon?)
And so with laudable dispatch decide
Whether we, in the main (to sink detail)
Were one the Pope should hold fast or let go.
"What, take the credit from the Law?" you ask?
Indeed, we did! Law ducks to Gospel here:
Why should Law gain the glory and pronounce
A judgment shall immortalize the Pope?
Yes: our self-abnegating policy
Was Joab's — we would rouse our David's sloth,
Bid him encamp against a city, sack
A place whereto ourselves had long laid siege,
Lest, taking it at last, it take our name
Nor be styled *Innocentinopolis*.
But no! The modesty was in alarm,
The temperance refused to interfere,
Returned us our petition with the word
"*Ad judices suos*," "Leave him to his Judge!"
As who should say, "Why trouble my repose?

Why consult Peter in a simple case,
Peter's wife's sister in her fever-fit
Might solve as readily as the Apostle's self?
Are my Tribunals posed by aught so plain?
Hath not my Court a conscience? It is of age,
Ask it!"

We do ask, — but, inspire reply
To the Court thou bidst me ask, as I have asked —
Oh thou, who vigilantly dost attend
To even the few, the ineffectual words
Which rise from this our low and mundane sphere
Up to thy region out of smoke and noise,
Seeking corroboration from thy nod
Who art all justice — which means mercy too,
In a low noisy smoky world like ours
Where Adam's sin made peccable his seed!
We venerate the father of the flock,
Whose last faint sands of life, the frittered gold,
Fall noiselessly, yet all too fast, o' the cone
And tapering heap of those collected years:
Never have these been hurried in their flow,
Though justice fain would jog reluctant arm,
In eagerness to take the forfeiture
Of guilty life: much less shall mercy sue
In vain that thou let innocence survive,
Precipitate no minim of the mass
O' the all-so precious moments of thy life,
By pushing Guido into death and doom!

(Our Cardinal engages to go read
The Pope my speech, and point its beauties out.
They say, the Pope has one half-hour, in twelve,
Of something like a moderate return
Of the intellectuals, — never much to lose! —
If I adroitly plant this passage there,
The Fisc will find himself forestalled, I think,
Though he stand, beat till the old ear-drum break!
— Ah, boy of my own bowels, Hyacinth,
Wilt ever catch the knack, requite the pains
Of poor papa, become proficient too
I' the how and why and when, the time to laugh,
The time to weep, the time, again, to pray,
And all the times prescribed by Holy Writ?
Well, well, we fathers can but care, but cast
Our bread upon the waters!)

In a word,
These secondary charges go to ground,
Since secondary, and superfluous, — motes
Quite from the main point: we did all and some,
Little and much, adjunct and principal,
Causa honoris. Is there such a cause
As the sake of honor? By that sole test try
Our action, nor demand if more or less,
Because of the action's mode, we merit blame
Or maybe deserve praise! The Court decides.
Is the end lawful? It allows the means:
What we may do, we may with safety do,
And what means "safety" we ourselves must judge.
Put case a person wrongs me past dispute:
If my legitimate vengeance be a blow,
Mistrusting my bare arm can deal that blow,
I claim co-operation of a stick;
Doubtful if stick be tough, I crave a sword;
Diffident of ability in fence,
I fee a friend, a swordsman to assist:
Take one — he may be coward, fool or knave:
Why not take fifty? — and if these exceed
I' the due degree of drubbing, whom accuse
But the first author of the aforesaid wrong
Who put poor me to such a world of pains?
Surgery would have just excised a wart;
The patient made such pother, struggled so
That the sharp instrument sliced nose and all.
Taunt us not that our friends performed for pay!
Ourselves had toiled for simple honor's sake:
But country clowns want dirt they comprehend,
The piece of gold! Our reasons, which suffice
Ourselves, be ours alone; our piece of gold
Be, to the rustic, reason he approves!
We must translate our motives like our speech,
Into the lower phrase that suits the sense
O' the limitedly apprehensive. Let
Each level have its language! Heaven speaks first
To the angel, then the angel tames the word
Down to the ear of Tobit: he, in turn,
Diminishes the message to his dog,
And finally that dog finds how the flea
(Which else, importunate, might check his speed)
Shall learn its hunger must have holiday,
By application of his tongue or paw:
So many varied sorts of language here,

Each following each with pace to match the step,
Haud passibus æquis!

Talking of which flea,
Reminds me I must put in special word
For the poor humble following, — the four friends,
Sicarii, our assassins caught and caged.
Ourselves are safe in your approval now:
Yet must we care for our companions, plead
The cause o' the poor, the friends (of old-world faith)
Who lie in tribulation for our sake.
Pauperum Procurator is my style:
I stand forth as the poor man's advocate:
And when we treat of what concerns the poor,
Et cum agatur de pauperibus,
In bondage, *carceratis*, for their sake,
In eorum causis, natural piety,
Pietas, ever ought to win the day,
Triumphare debet, quia ipsi sunt,
Because those very paupers constitute,
Thesaurus Christi, all the wealth of Christ.
Nevertheless I shall not hold you long
With multiplicity of proofs, nor burn
Candle at noontide, clarify the clear.
There beams a case refulgent from our books —
Castrensis, Butringarius, everywhere
I find it burn to dissipate the dark.
'T is this: a husband had a friend, which friend
Seemed to him over-friendly with his wife
In thought and purpose, — I pretend no more.
To justify suspicion or dispel,
He bids his wife make show of giving heed,
Semblance of sympathy — propose, in fine,
A secret meeting in a private place.
The friend, enticed thus, finds an ambuscade,
To wit, the husband posted with a pack
Of other friends, who fall upon the first
And beat his love and life out both at once.
These friends were brought to question for their help;
Law ruled, "The husband being in the right,
Who helped him in the right can scarce be wrong" —
Opinio, an opinion every way,
Multum tenenda cordi, heart should hold!
When the inferiors follow as befits
The lead o' the principal, they change their name,
And, *non dicuntur*, are no longer called

His mandatories, *mandatorii,*
But helpmates, *sed auxiliatores;* since
To that degree does honor's sake lend aid,
Adeo honoris causa est efficax,
That not alone, *non solum,* does it pour
Itself out, *se diffundat,* on mere friends
We bring to do our bidding of this sort,
In mandatorios simplices, but sucks
Along with it in wide and generous whirl,
Sed etiam assassinii qualitate
Qualificatos, people qualified
By the quality of assassination's self,
Dare I make use of such neologism,
Ut utar verbo.

Haste we to conclude:
Of the other points that favor, leave some few
For Spreti; such as the delinquents' youth.
One of them falls short, by some months, of age
Fit to be managed by the gallows; two
May plead exemption from our law's award,
Being foreigners, subjects of the Granduke —
I spare that bone to Spreti, and reserve
Myself the juicier breast of argument —
Flinging the breast-blade i' the face o' the Fisc,
Who furnished me the tidbit: he must needs
Play off his privilege and rack the clowns, —
And they, at instance of the rack, confess
All four unanimously made resolve, —
The night o' the murder, in brief minute snatched
Behind the back of Guido as he fled, —
That, since he had not kept his promise, paid
The money for the murder on the spot,
So, reaching home again, might please ignore
The pact or pay them in improper coin, —
They one and all resolved, these hopeful friends,
'T were best inaugurate the morrow's light,
Nature recruited with her due repose,
By killing Guido as he lay asleep
Pillowed on wallet which contained their fee.

I thank the Fisc for knowledge of this fact:
What fact could hope to make more manifest
Their rectitude, Guido's integrity?
For who fails recognize the touching truth
That these poor rustics bore no envy, hate,

Malice nor yet uncharitableness
Against the people they had put to death?
In them, did such an act reward itself?
All done was to deserve the simple pay,
Obtain the bread clowns earn by sweat of brow,
And missing which, they missed of everything —
Hence claimed pay, even at expense of life
To their own lord, so little warped (admire!)
By prepossession, such the absolute
Instinct of equity in rustic souls!
Whereas our Count, the cultivated mind,
He, wholly rapt in his serene regard
Of honor, he contemplating the sun,
Who hardly marks if taper blink below,
He, dreaming of no argument for death
Except a vengeance worthy noble hearts, —
Dared not so desecrate the deed, forsooth,
Vulgarize vengeance, as defray its cost
By money dug from out the dirty earth,
Irritant mere, in Ovid's phrase, to ill.
What though he lured base hinds by lucre's hope, —
The only motive they could masticate,
Milk for babes, not strong meat which men require?
The deed done, those coarse hands were soiled enough,
He spared them the pollution of the pay.
So much for the allegement, thine, my Fisc,
Quo nil absurdius, than which nought more mad,
Excogitari potest, may be squeezed
From out the cogitative brain of thee!

And now, thou excellent the Governor!
(Push to the peroration) *cæterum*
Enixe supplico, I strive in prayer,
Ut dominis meis, that unto the Court,
Benigna fronte, with a gracious brow,
Et oculis serenis, and mild eyes,
Perpendere placeat, it may please them weigh,
Quod dominus Guido, that our noble Count,
Occidit, did the killing in dispute,
Ut ejus honor tumulatus, that
The honor of him buried fathom-deep
In infamy, *in infamia*, might arise,
Resurgeret, as ghost breaks sepulchre!
Occidit, for he killed, *uxorem*, wife,
Quia illi fuit, since she was to him,
Opprobrio, a disgrace and nothing more!

Et genitores, killed her parents too,
Qui, who, *postposita verecundia*,
Having thrown off all sort of decency,
Filiam repudiarunt, had renounced
Their daughter, *atque declarare non*
Erubuerunt, nor felt blush tinge cheek,
Declaring, *meretricis genitam*
Esse, she was the offspring of a drab,
Ut ipse dehonestaretur, just
That so himself might lose his social rank!
Cujus mentem, and which daughter's heart and soul,
They, *perverterunt*, turned from the right course,
Et ad illicitos amores non
Dumtaxat pellexerunt, and to love
Not simply did alluringly incite,
Sed vi obedientiæ, but by force
O' the duty, *filialis*, daughters owe,
Coegerunt, forced and drove her to the deed:
Occidit, I repeat he killed the clan,
Ne scilicet amplius in dedecore,
Lest peradventure longer life might trail,
Viveret, link by link his turpitude,
Invisus consanguineis, hateful so
To kith and kindred, *a nobilibus*
Notatus, shunned by men of quality,
Relictus ab amicis, left i' the lurch
By friends, *ab omnibus derisus*, turned
A common hack-block to try edge of jokes.
Occidit, and he killed them here in Rome,
In Urbe, the Eternal City, Sirs,
Nempe quæ alias spectata est,
The appropriate theatre which witnessed once,
Matronam nobilem, Lucretia's self,
Abluere pudicitiæ maculas,
Wash off the spots of her pudicity,
Sanguine proprio, with her own pure blood;
Quæ vidit, and which city also saw,
Patrem, Virginius, *undequaque*, quite,
Impunem, with no sort of punishment,
Nor, *et non illaudatum*, lacking praise,
Sed polluentem parricidio,
Imbrue his hands with butchery, *filiæ*,
Of chaste Virginia, to avoid a rape,
Ne raperetur ad stupra; so to heart,
Tanti illi cordi fuit, did he take,
Suspicio, the mere fancy men might have,

Honoris amittendi, of fame's loss,
Ut potius voluerit filia
Orbari, he preferred to lose his child,
Quam illa incederet, rather than she walk
The ways an, *inhonesta*, child disgraced,
Licet non sponte, though against her will.
Occidit — killed them, I reiterate —
In propria domo, in their own abode,
Ut adultera et parentes, that each wretch,
Conscii agnoscerent, might both see and say,
Nullum locum, there 's no place, *nullumque esse*
Asylum, nor yet refuge of escape,
Impenetrabilem, shall serve as bar,
Honori læso, to the wounded one
In honor; *neve ibi opprobria*
Continuarentur, killed them on the spot
Moreover, dreading lest within those walls
The opprobrium peradventure be prolonged,
Et domus quæ testis fuit turpium,
And that the domicile which witnessed crime,
Esset et pœnæ, might watch punishment:
Occidit, killed, I round you in the ears,
Quia alio modo, since by other mode,
Non poterat ejus existimatio,
There was no possibility his fame,
Læsa, gashed griesly, *tam enormiter*,
Ducere cicatrices, might be healed:
Occidit ut exemplum præberet
Uxoribus, killed her, so to lesson wives
Jura conjugii, that the marriage-oath,
Esse servanda, must be kept henceforth:
Occidit denique, killed her, in a word,
Ut pro posse honestus viveret,
That he, please God, might creditably live,
Sin minus, but if fate willed otherwise,
Proprii honoris, of his outraged fame,
Offensi, by Mannaia, if you please,
Commiseranda victima caderet,
The pitiable victim he should fall!

Done! I' the rough, i' the rough! But done! And, lo,
Landed and stranded lies my very speech,
My miracle, my monster of defence —
Leviathan into the nose whereof
I have put fish-hook, pierced his jaw with thorn,
And given him to my maidens for a play!

I' the rough: to-morrow I review my piece,
Tame here and there undue floridity.
It 's hard: you have to plead before these priests
And poke at them with Scripture, or you pass
For heathen and, what 's worse, for ignorant
O' the quality o' the Court and what it likes
By way of illustration of the law.
To-morrow stick in this, and throw out that,
And, having first ecclesiasticized,
Regularize the whole, next emphasize,
Then latinize, and lastly Cicero-ize,
Giving my Fisc his finish. There 's my speech!
And where 's my fry, and family and friends?
Where 's that huge Hyacinth I mean to hug
Till he cries out, "*Jam satis!* Let me breathe!"
Now, what an evening have I earned to-day!
Hail, ye true pleasures, all the rest are false!
Oh, the old mother, oh, the fattish wife!
Rogue Hyacinth shall put on paper toque,
And wrap himself around with mamma's veil
Done up to imitate papa's black robe,
(I 'm in the secret of the comedy, —
Part of the program leaked out long ago!)
And call himself the Advocate o' the Poor,
Mimic Don father that defends the Count:
And for reward shall have a small full glass
Of manly red rosolio to himself,
— Always provided that he conjugate
Bibo, I drink, correctly — nor be found
Make the *perfectum, bipsi*, as last year!
How the ambitious do so harden heart
As lightly hold by these home-sanctitudes,
To me is matter of bewilderment —
Bewilderment! Because ambition's range
Is nowise tethered by domestic tie:
Am I refused an outlet from my home
To the world's stage? — whereon a man should play
The man in public, vigilant for law,
Zealous for truth, a credit to his kind,
Nay, — since, employing talent so, I yield
The Lord His own again with usury, —
A satisfaction, yea, to God Himself!
Well, I have modelled me by Agur's wish,
"Remove far from me vanity and lies,
Feed me with food convenient for me!" What
I' the world should a wise man require beyond?

Can I but coax the good fat little wife
To tell her fool of a father the mad prank
His scapegrace nephew played this time last year
At Carnival! He could not choose, I think,
But modify that inconsiderate gift
O' the cup and cover (somewhere in the will
Under the pillow, some one seems to guess)
— Correct that clause in favor of a boy
The trifle ought to grace, with name engraved,
Would look so well, produced in future years
To pledge a memory, when poor papa
Latin and law are long since laid at rest —
Hyacintho dono dedit avus! Why,
The wife should get a necklace for her pains,
The very pearls that made Violante proud,
And Pietro pawned for half their value once, —
Redeemable by somebody, *ne sit*
Marita quæ rotundioribus
Onusta mammis . . . baccis ambulet:
Her bosom shall display the big round balls,
No braver proudly borne by wedded wife!
With which Horatian promise I conclude.

Into the pigeon-hole with thee, my speech!
Off and away, first work, then play, play, play!
Bottini, burn thy books, thou blazing ass!
Sing "Tra-la-la, for, lambkins, we must live!"

IX.

JURIS DOCTOR JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS,

FISCI ET REV. CAM. APOSTOL. ADVOCATUS.

Had I God's leave, how I would alter things!
If I might read instead of print my speech, —
Ay, and enliven speech with many a flower
Refuses obstinate to blow in print,
As wildings planted in a prim parterre, —
This scurvy room were turned an immense hall;
Opposite, fifty judges in a row;
This side and that of me, for audience — Rome:
And, where yon window is, the Pope should hide —
Watch, curtained, but peep visibly enough.
A buzz of expectation! Through the crowd,
Jingling his chain and stumping with his staff,
Up comes an usher, louts him low, "The Court
Requires the allocution of the Fisc!"
I rise, I bend, I look about me, pause
O'er the hushed multitude: I count — One, two —

Have ye seen, Judges, have ye, lights of law, —
When it may hap some painter, much in vogue
Throughout our city nutritive of arts,
Ye summon to a task shall test his worth,
To manufacture, as he knows and can,
A work may decorate a palace-wall,
Afford my lords their Holy Family, —
Hath it escaped the acumen of the Court
How such a painter sets himself to paint?
Suppose that Joseph, Mary and her Babe
A-journeying to Egypt, prove the piece:
Why, first he sedulously practiseth,
This painter, — girding loin and lighting lamp, —
On what may nourish eye, make facile hand;
Getteth him studies (styled by draughtsmen so)
From some assistant corpse of Jew or Turk

Or, haply, Molinist, he cuts and carves, —
This Luca or this Carlo or the like.
To him the bones their inmost secret yield,
Each notch and nodule signify their use:
On him the muscles turn, in triple tier,
And pleasantly entreat the entrusted man
"Familiarize thee with our play that lifts
Thus, and thus lowers again, leg, arm and foot!"
— Ensuring due correctness in the nude.
Which done, is all done? Not a whit, ye know!
He, — to art's surface rising from her depth, —
If some flax-polled soft-bearded sire be found,
May simulate a Joseph, (happy chance!) —
Limneth exact each wrinkle of the brow,
Loseth no involution, cheek or chap,
Till lo, in black and white, the senior lives!
Is it a young and comely peasant-nurse
That poseth? (be the phrase accorded me!)
Each feminine delight of florid lip,
Eyes brimming o'er and brow bowed down with love,
Marmoreal neck and bosom uberous, —
Glad on the paper in a trice they go
To help his notion of the Mother-maid:
Methinks I see it, chalk a little stumped!
Yea and her babe — that flexure of soft limbs,
That budding face imbued with dewy sleep,
Contribute each an excellence to Christ.
Nay, since he humbly lent companionship,
Even the poor ass, unpanniered and elate
Stands, perks an ear up, he a model too;
While clouted shoon, staff, scrip and water-gourd, —
Aught may betoken travel, heat and haste, —
No jot nor tittle of these but in its turn
Ministers to perfection of the piece:
Till now, such piece before him, part by part, —
Such prelude ended, — pause our painter may,
Submit his fifty studies one by one,
And in some sort boast "I have served my lords."

But what? And hath he painted once this while?
Or when ye cry, "Produce the thing required,
Show us our picture shall rejoice its niche,
Thy Journey through the Desert done in oils!" —
What, doth he fall to shuffling 'mid his sheets,
Fumbling for first this, then the other fact
Consigned to paper, — "studies," bear the term! —

And stretch a canvas, mix a pot of paste,
And fasten here a head and there a tail,
(The ass hath one, my Judges!) so dove-tail
Or, rather, ass-tail in, piece sorrily out —
By bits of reproduction of the life —
The picture, the expected Family?
I trow not! do I miss with my conceit
The mark, my lords? — not so my lords were served!
Rather your artist turns abrupt from these,
And preferably buries him and broods
(Quite away from aught vulgar and extern)
On the inner spectrum, filtered through the eye,
His brain-deposit, bred of many a drop,
E pluribus unum: and the wiser he!
For in that brain, — their fancy sees at work,
Could my lords peep indulged, — results alone,
Not processes which nourish such results,
Would they discover and appreciate, — life
Fed by digestion, not raw food itself,
No gobbets but smooth comfortable chyme
Secreted from each snapped-up crudity, —
Less distinct, part by part, but in the whole
Truer to the subject, — the main central truth
And soul o' the picture, would my Judges spy, —
Not those mere fragmentary studied facts
Which answer to the outward frame and flesh —
Not this nose, not that eyebrow, the other fact
Of man's staff, woman's stole or infant's clout,
But lo, a spirit-birth conceived of flesh,
Truth rare and real, not transcripts, fact and false.
The studies — for his pupils and himself!
The picture be for our eximious Rome
And — who knows? — satisfy its Governor,
Whose new wing to the villa he hath bought
(God give him joy of it) by Capena, soon
('T is bruited) shall be glowing with the brush
Of who hath long surpassed the Florentine,
The Urbinate and . . . what if I dared add,
Even his master, yea the Cortonese, —
I mean the accomplished Ciro Ferri, Sirs!
(— Did not he die? I 'll see before I print.)

End we exordium, Phœbus plucks my ear!
Thus then, just so and no whit otherwise,
Have I, — engaged as I were Ciro's self,
To paint a parallel, a Family,

The patriarch Pietro with his wise old wife
To boot (as if one introduced Saint Anne
By bold conjecture to complete the group)
And juvenile Pompilia with her babe,
Who, seeking safety in the wilderness,
Were all surprised by Herod, while outstretched
In sleep beneath a palm-tree by a spring,
And killed — the very circumstance I paint,
Moving the pity and terror of my lords —
Exactly so have I, a month at least,
Your Fiscal, made me cognizant of facts,
Searched out, pried into, pressed the meaning forth
Of every piece of evidence in point,
How bloody Herod slew these innocents, —
Until the glad result is gained, the group
Demonstrably presented in detail,
Their slumber and his onslaught, — like as life.
Yea, and, availing me of help allowed
By law, discreet provision lest my lords
Be too much troubled by effrontery, —
The rack, law plies suspected crime withal —
(Law that hath listened while the lyrist sang
"*Lene tormentum ingenio admoves*,"
Gently thou joggest by a twinge the wit,
"*Plerumque duro*," else were slow to blab!)
Through this concession my full cup runs o'er:
The guilty owns his guilt without reserve.
Therefore by part and part I clutch my case
Which, in entirety now, — momentous task, —
My lords demand, so render them I must,
Since, one poor pleading more and I have done.
But shall I ply my papers, play my proofs,
Parade my studies, fifty in a row,
As though the Court were yet in pupilage,
Claimed not the artist's ultimate appeal?
Much rather let me soar the height prescribed
And, bowing low, proffer my picture's self!
No more of proof, disproof, — such virtue was,
Such vice was never in Pompilia, now!
Far better say "Behold Pompilia!" — (for
I leave the family as unmanageable,
And stick to just one portrait, but life-size.)
Hath calumny imputed to the fair
A blemish, mole on cheek or wart on chin,
Much more, blind hidden horrors best unnamed?
Shall I descend to prove you, point by point,

Never was knock-knee known nor splay-foot found
In Phryne? (I must let the portrait go,
Content me with the model, I believe) —
— I prove this? An indignant sweep of hand,
Dash at and doing away with drapery,
And, — use your eyes, Athenians, smooth she smiles!
Or, — since my client can no longer smile,
And more appropriate instances abound, —
What is this Tale of Tarquin, how the slave
Was caught by him, preferred to Collatine?
Thou, even from thy corpse-clothes virginal,
Look'st the lie dead, Lucretia!
Thus at least
I, by the guidance of antiquity,
(Our one infallible guide,) now operate,
Sure that the innocence thus shown is safe;
Sure, too, that, while I plead, the echoes cry
(Lend my weak voice thy trump, sonorous Fame!)
"Monstrosity the Phrynean shape shall mar,
Lucretia's soul comport with Tarquin's lie,
When thistles grow on vines or thorns yield figs,
Or oblique sentence leave this judgment-seat!"

A great theme: may my strength be adequate!
For — paint Pompilia, dares my feebleness?
How did I unaware engage so much
— Find myself undertaking to produce
A faultless nature in a flawless form?
What 's here? Oh, turn aside nor dare the blaze
Of such a crown, such constellation, say,
As jewels here thy front, Humanity!
First, infancy, pellucid as a pearl;
Then, childhood — stone which, dewdrop at the first,
(An old conjecture) sucks, by dint of gaze,
Blue from the sky and turns to sapphire so:
Yet both these gems eclipsed by, last and best,
Womanliness and wifehood opaline,
Its milk-white pallor, — chastity, — suffused
With here and there a tint and hint of flame, —
Desire, — the lapidary loves to find.
Such jewels bind conspicuously thy brow,
Pompilia, infant, child, maid, woman, wife —
Crown the ideal in our earth at last!
What should a faculty like mine do here?
Close eyes, or else, the rashlier hurry hand!

Which is to say, — lose no time but begin!
Sermocinando ne declamem, Sirs,
Ultra clepsydram, as our preachers smile,
Lest I exceed my hour-glass. Whereupon,
As Flaccus prompts, I dare the epic plunge —
Begin at once with marriage, up till when
Little or nothing would arrest your love,
In the easeful life o' the lady; lamb and lamb,
How do they differ? Know one, you know all
Manners of maidenhood: mere maiden she.
And since all lambs are like in more than fleece,
Prepare to find that, lamb-like, she too frisks —
O' the weaker sex, my lords, the weaker sex!
To whom, the Teian teaches us, for gift,
Not strength, — man's dower, — but beauty, nature gave,
"Beauty in lieu of spears, in lieu of shields!"
And what is beauty's sure concomitant,
Nay, intimate essential character,
But melting wiles, deliciousest deceits,
The whole redoubted armory of love?
Therefore of vernal pranks, dishevellings
O' the hair of youth that dances April in,
And easily-imagined Hebe-slips
O'er sward which May makes over-smooth for foot —
These shall we pry into? — or wiselier wink,
Though numerous and dear they may have been?

For lo, advancing Hymen and his pomp!
Discedunt nunc amores, loves, farewell!
Maneat amor, let love, the sole, remain!
Farewell to dewiness and prime of life!
Remains the rough determined day: dance done,
To work, with plough and harrow! What comes next?
'T is Guido henceforth guides Pompilia's step,
Cries "No more friskings o'er the foodful glebe,
Else, 'ware the whip!" Accordingly, — first crack
O' the thong, — we hear that his young wife was barred,
Cohibita fuit, from the old free life,
Vitam liberiorem ducere.
Demur we? Nowise: heifer brave the hind?
We seek not there should lapse the natural law,
The proper piety to lord and king
And husband: let the heifer bear the yoke!
Only, I crave he cast not patience off,
This hind; for deem you she endures the whip,
Nor winces at the goad, nay, restive, kicks?

What if the adversary's charge be just,
And all untowardly she pursue her way
With groan and grunt, though hind strike ne'er so hard?
If petulant remonstrance made appeal,
Unseasonable, o'erprotracted, — if
Importunate challenge taxed the public ear
When silence more decorously had served
For protestation, — if Pompilian plaint
Wrought but to aggravate Guidonian ire, —
Why, such mishaps, ungainly though they be,
Ever companion change, are incident
To altered modes and novelty of life:
The philosophic mind expects no less,
Smilingly knows and names the crisis, sits
Waiting till old things go and new arrive.
Therefore, I hold a husband but inept
Who turns impatient at such transit-time,
As if this running from the rod would last!

Since, even while I speak, the end is reached:
Success awaits the soon-disheartened man.
The parents turn their backs and leave the house,
The wife may wail but none shall intervene:
He hath attained his object, groom and bride
Partake the nuptial bower no soul can see,
Old things are passed and all again is new,
Over and gone the obstacles to peace,
Novorum — tenderly the Mantuan turns
The expression, some such purpose in his eye —
Nascitur ordo! Every storm is laid,
And forth from plain each pleasant herb may peep,
Each bloom of wifehood in abeyance late:
(Confer a passage in the Canticles.)

But what if, as 't is wont with plant and wife,
Flowers, — after a suppression to good end,
Still, when they do spring forth — sprout here, spread there,
Anywhere likelier than beneath the foot
O' the lawful good-man gardener of the ground?
He dug and dibbled, sowed and watered, — still
'T is a chance wayfarer shall pluck the increase.
Just so, respecting persons not too much,
The lady, foes allege, put forth each charm
And proper floweret of feminity
To whosoever had a nose to smell
Or breast to deck: what if the charge be true?

The fault were graver had she looked with choice,
Fastidiously appointed who should grasp,
Who, in the whole town, go without the prize!
To nobody she destined donative,
But, first come was first served, the accuser saith.
Put case her sort of . . . in this kind . . . escapes
Were many and oft and indiscriminate —
Impute ye as the action were prepense,
The gift particular, arguing malice so?
Which butterfly of the wide air shall brag
"I was preferred to Guido" — when 't is clear
The cup, he quaffs at, lay with olent breast
Open to gnat, midge, bee and moth as well?
One chalice entertained the company;
And if its peevish lord object the more,
Mistake, misname such bounty in a wife,
Haste we to advertise him — charm of cheek,
Lustre of eye, allowance of the lip,
All womanly components in a spouse,
These are no household-bread each stranger's bite
Leaves by so much diminished for the mouth
O' the master of the house at supper-time:
But rather like a lump of spice they lie,
Morsel of myrrh, which scents the neighborhood
Yet greets its lord no lighter by a grain.

Nay, even so, he shall be satisfied!
Concede we there was reason in his wrong,
Grant we his grievance and content the man!
For lo, Pompilia, she submits herself;
Ere three revolving years have crowned their course,
Off and away she puts this same reproach
Of lavish bounty, inconsiderate gift
O' the sweets of wifehood stored to other ends:
No longer shall he blame "She none excludes,"
But substitute "She laudably sees all,
Searches the best out and selects the same."
For who is here, long sought and latest found,
Waiting his turn unmoved amid the whirl,
"*Constans in levitate*," — Ha, my lords?
Calm in his levity, — indulge the quip! —
Since 't is a levite bears the bell away,
Parades him henceforth as Pompilia's choice.
'T is no ignoble object, husband! Doubt'st?
When here comes tripping Flaccus with his phrase,
"Trust me, no miscreant singled from the mob,

Crede non illum tibi de scelesta
Plebe delectum," but a man of mark,
A priest, dost hear? Why then, submit thyself!
Priest, ay, and very phœnix of such fowl,
Well-born, of culture, young and vigorous,
Comely too, since precise the precept points —
On the selected levite be there found
Nor mole nor scar nor blemish, lest the mind
Come all uncandid through the thwarting flesh!
Was not the son of Jesse ruddy, sleek,
Pleasant to look on, pleasant every way?
Since well he smote the harp and sweetly sang,
And danced till Abigail came out to see,
And seeing smiled and smiling ministered
The raisin-cluster and the cake of figs,
With ready meal refreshed the gifted youth,
Till Nabal, who was absent shearing sheep,
Felt heart sink, took to bed (discreetly done —
They might have been beforehand with him else)
And died — would Guido have behaved as well?
But ah, the faith of early days is gone,
Heu prisca fides! Nothing died in him
Save courtesy, good sense and proper trust,
Which, when they ebb from souls they should o'erflow,
Discover stub, weed, sludge and ugliness.
(The Pope, we know, is Neapolitan
And relishes a sea-side simile.)
Deserted by each charitable wave,
Guido, left high and dry, shows jealous now!
Jealous avouched, paraded: tax the fool
With any peccadillo, he responds,
"Truly I beat my wife through jealousy,
Imprisoned her and punished otherwise,
Being jealous: now would threaten, sword in hand,
Now manage to mix poison in her sight,
And so forth: jealously I dealt, in fine."
Concede thus much, and what remains to prove?
Have I to teach my masters what effect
Hath jealousy, and how, befooling men,
It makes false true, abuses eye and ear,
Turns mere mist adamantine, loads with sound
Silence, and into void and vacancy
Crowds a whole phalanx of conspiring foes?
Therefore who owns "I watched with jealousy
My wife," adds "for no reason in the world!"
What need that, thus proved madman, he remark

"The thing I thought a serpent proved an eel"?—
Perchance the right Comacchian, six foot length,
And not an inch too long for that rare pie
(Master Arcangeli has heard of such)
Whose succulence makes fasting bearable;
Meant to regale some moody splenetic
Who, pleasing to mistake the donor's gift,
Spying I know not what Lernæan snake
I' the luscious Lenten creature, stamps forsooth
The dainty in the dust.

Enough! Prepare,
Such lunes announced, for downright lunacy!
Insanit homo, threat succeeds to threat,
And blow redoubles blow,—his wife, the block.
But, if a block, shall not she jar the hand
That buffets her? The injurious idle stone
Rebounds and hits the head of him who flung.
Causeless rage breeds, i' the wife now, rageful cause,
Tyranny wakes rebellion from its sleep.
Rebellion, say I?—rather, self-defence,
Laudable wish to live and see good days,
Pricks our Pompilia now to fly the fool
By any means, at any price,—nay, more,
Nay, most of all, i' the very interest
O' the fool that, baffled of his blind desire
At any price, were truliest victor so.
Shall he effect his crime and lose his soul?
No, dictates duty to a loving wife!
Far better that the unconsummate blow,
Adroitly balked by her, should back again,
Correctively admonish his own pate!

Crime then,—the Court is with me?—she must crush;
How crush it? By all efficacious means;
And these,—why, what in woman should they be?
"With horns the bull, with teeth the lion fights;
To woman," quoth the lyrist quoted late,
"Nor teeth, nor horns, but beauty, Nature gave!"
Pretty i' the Pagan! Who dares blame the use
Of armory thus allowed for natural,—
Exclaim against a seeming-dubious play
O' the sole permitted weapon, spear and shield
Alike, resorted to i' the circumstance
By poor Pompilia? Grant she somewhat plied
Arts that allure, the magic nod and wink,

The witchery of gesture, spell of word,
Whereby the likelier to enlist this friend,
Yea stranger, as a champion on her side?
Such man, being but mere man, ('t was all she knew,)
Must be made sure by beauty's silken bond,
The weakness that subdues the strong, and bows
Wisdom alike and folly. Grant the tale
O' the husband, which is false, were proved and true
To the letter — or the letters, I should say,
Abominations he professed to find
And fix upon Pompilia and the priest, —
Allow them hers — for though she could not write,
In early days of Eve-like innocence
That plucked no apple from the knowledge-tree,
Yet, at the Serpent's word, Eve plucks and eats
And knows — especially how to read and write:
And so Pompilia, — as the move o' the maw,
Quoth Persius, makes a parrot bid "Good day!"
A crow salute the concave, and a pie
Endeavor at proficiency in speech, —
So she, through hunger after fellowship,
May well have learned, though late, to play the scribe:
As indeed, there 's one letter on the list
Explicitly declares did happen here.
"You thought my letters could be none of mine,"
She tells her parents — "mine, who wanted skill;
But now I have the skill, and write, you see!"
She needed write love-letters, so she learned,
"*Negatas artifex sequi voces*" — though
This letter nowise 'scapes the common lot,
But lies i' the condemnation of the rest,
Found by the husband's self who forged them all.
Yet, for the sacredness of argument,
For this once an exemption shall it plead —
Anything, anything to let the wheels
Of argument run glibly to their goal!
Concede she wrote (which were preposterous)
This and the other epistle, — what of it?
Where does the figment touch her candid fame?
Being in peril of her life — "my life,
Not an hour's purchase," as the letter runs, —
And having but one stay in this extreme,
Out of the wide world but a single friend —
What could she other than resort to him,
And how with any hope resort but thus?
Shall modesty dare bid a stranger brave

Danger, disgrace, nay death in her behalf —
Think to entice the sternness of the steel
Yet spare love's loadstone moving manly mind?
— Most of all, when such mind is hampered so
By growth of circumstance athwart the life
O' the natural man, that decency forbids
He stoop and take the common privilege,
Say frank "I love," as all the vulgar do.
A man is wedded to philosophy,
Married to statesmanship; a man is old;
A man is fettered by the foolishness
He took for wisdom and talked ten years since;
A man is, like our friend the Canon here,
A priest, and wicked if he break his vow:
Shall he dare love, who may be Pope one day?
Despite the coil of such encumbrance here,
Suppose this man could love, unhappily,
And would love, dared he only let love show!
In case the woman of his love, speaks first,
From what embarrassment she sets him free!
"'T is I who break reserve, begin appeal,
Confess that, whether you love me or no,
I love you!" What an ease to dignity,
What help of pride from the hard high-backed chair
Down to the carpet where the kittens bask,
All under the pretence of gratitude!

From all which, I deduce — the lady here
Was bound to proffer nothing short of love
To the priest whose service was to save her. What?
Shall she propose him lucre, dust o' the mine,
Rubbish o' the rock, some diamond, muckworms prize,
Some pearl secreted by a sickly fish?
Scarcely! She caters for a generous taste.
'T is love shall beckon, beauty bid to breast,
Till all the Samson sink into the snare!
Because, permit the end — permit therewith
Means to the end!

How say you, good my lords?
I hope you heard my adversary ring
The changes on this precept: now, let me
Reverse the peal! *Quia dato licito fine,*
Ad illum assequendum ordinata
Non sunt damnanda media, — licit end
Enough was found in mere escape from death,
To legalize our means illicit else

Of feigned love, false allurement, fancied fact.
Thus Venus losing Cupid on a day,
(See that *Idyllium Moschi*) seeking help,
In the anxiety of motherhood,
Allowably promised, "Who shall bring report
Where he is wandered to, my winged babe,
I give him for reward a nectared kiss;
But who brings safely back the truant's self,
His be a super-sweet makes kiss seem cold!"
Are not these things writ for example-sake?

To such permitted motive, then, refer
All those professions, else were hard explain,
Of hope, fear, jealousy, and the rest of love!
He is Myrtillus, Amaryllis she,
She burns, he freezes, — all a mere device
To catch and keep the man, may save her life,
Whom otherwise nor catches she nor keeps!
Worst, once, turns best now: in all faith, she feigns:
Feigning, — the liker innocence to guilt,
The truer to the life in what she feigns!
How if Ulysses, — when, for public good
He sunk particular qualms and played the spy,
Entered Troy's hostile gate in beggar's garb —
How if he first had boggled at this clout,
Grown dainty o'er that clack-dish? Grime is grace
To whoso gropes amid the dung for gold.

Hence, beyond promises, we praise each proof
That promise was not simply made to break,
Mere moonshine-structure meant to fade at dawn:
We praise, as consequent and requisite,
What, enemies allege, were more than words,
Deeds — meetings at the window, twilight-trysts,
Nocturnal entertainments in the dim
Old labyrinthine palace; lies, we know —
Inventions we, long since, turned inside out.
Must such external semblance of intrigue
Demonstrate that intrigue there lurks perdue?
Does every hazel-sheath disclose a nut?
He were a Molinist who dared maintain
That midnight meetings in a screened alcove
Must argue folly in a matron — since
So would he bring a slur on Judith's self,
Commended beyond women, that she lured
The lustful to destruction through his lust.

Pompilia took not Judith's liberty,
No falchion find you in her hand to smite,
No damsel to convey in dish the head
Of Holofernes, — style the Canon so —
Or is it the Count? If I entangle me
With my similitudes, — if wax wings melt,
And earthward down I drop, not mine the fault:
Blame your beneficence, O Court, O sun,
Whereof the beamy smile affects my flight!
What matter, so Pompilia's fame revive
I' the warmth that proves the bane of Icarus?

Yea, we have shown it lawful, necessary
Pompilia leave her husband, seek the house
O' the parents: and because 'twixt home and home
Lies a long road with many a danger rife,
Lions by the way and serpents in the path,
To rob and ravish, — much behoves she keep
Each shadow of suspicion from fair fame,
For her own sake much, but for his sake more,
The ingrate husband's. Evidence shall be,
Plain witness to the world how white she walks
I' the mire she wanders through ere Rome she reach.
And who so proper witness as a priest?
Gainsay ye? Let me hear who dares gainsay!
I hope we still can punish heretics!
"Give me the man," I say with him of Gath,
"That we may fight together!" None, I think:
The priest is granted me.

Then, if a priest,
One juvenile and potent: else, mayhap,
That dragon, our Saint George would slay, slays him.
And should fair face accompany strong hand,
The more complete equipment: nothing mars
Work, else praiseworthy, like a bodily flaw
I' the worker: as 't is said Saint Paul himself
Deplored the check o' the puny presence, still
Cheating his fulmination of its flash,
Albeit the bolt therein went true to oak.
Therefore the agent, as prescribed, she takes, —
Both juvenile and potent, handsome too, —
In all obedience: "good," you grant again.
Do you? I would you were the husband, lords!
How prompt and facile might departure be!
How boldly would Pompilia and the priest
March out of door, spread flag at beat of drum,

But that inapprehensive Guido grants
Neither premiss nor yet conclusion here,
And, purblind, dreads a bear in every bush!
For his own quietude and comfort, then,
Means must be found for flight in masquerade
At hour when all things sleep — "Save jealousy!"
Right, Judges! Therefore shall the lady's wit
Supply the boon thwart nature balks him of,
And do him service with the potent drug
(Helen's nepenthe, as my lords opine)
Which respites blessedly each fretted nerve
O' the much-enduring man: accordingly,
There lies he, duly dosed and sound asleep,
Relieved of woes or real or raved about.
While soft she leaves his side, he shall not wake;
Nor stop who steals away to join her friend,
Nor do him mischief should he catch that friend
Intent on more than friendly office, — nay,
Nor get himself raw head and bones laid bare
In payment of his apparition!

Thus
Would I defend the step, — were the thing true
Which is a fable, — see my former speech, —
That Guido slept (who never slept a wink)
Through treachery, an opiate from his wife,
Who not so much as knew what opiates mean.

Now she may start: or hist, — a stoppage still!
A journey is an enterprise of cost!
As in campaigns, we fight but others pay,
Suis expensis, nemo militat.
'T is Guido's self we guard from accident,
Ensuring safety to Pompilia, versed
Nowise in misadventures by the way,
Hard riding and rough quarters, the rude fare,
The unready host. What magic mitigates
Each plague of travel to the unpractised wife?
Money, sweet Sirs! And were the fiction fact,
She helped herself thereto with liberal hand
From out her husband's store, — what fitter use
Was ever husband's money destined to?
With bag and baggage thus did Dido once
Decamp, — for more authority, a queen!

So is she fairly on her route at last,
Prepared for either fortune: nay and if

The priest, now all aglow with enterprise,
Cool somewhat presently when fades the flush
O' the first adventure, clouded o'er belike
By doubts, misgivings how the day may die,
Though born with such auroral brilliance, — if
The brow seem over-pensive and the lip
'Gin lag and lose the prattle lightsome late, —
Vanquished by tedium of a prolonged jaunt
In a close carriage o'er a jolting road,
With only one young female substitute
For seventeen other Canons of ripe age
Were wont to keep him company in church, —
Shall not Pompilia haste to dissipate
The silent cloud that, gathering, bodes her bale? —
Prop the irresoluteness may portend
Suspension of the project, check the flight,
Bring ruin on them both? Use every means,
Since means to the end are lawful! What i' the way
Of wile should have allowance like a kiss
Sagely and sisterly administered,
Sororia saltem oscula? We find
Such was the remedy her wit applied
To each incipient scruple of the priest,
If we believe, — as, while my wit is mine
I cannot, — what the driver testifies,
Borsi, called Venerino, the mere tool
Of Guido and his friend the Governor, —
Avowal I proved wrung from out the wretch,
After long rotting in imprisonment,
As price of liberty and favor: long
They tempted, he at last succumbed, and lo
Counted them out full tale each kiss and more,
"The journey being one long embrace," quoth he.
Still, though we should believe the driver's lie,
Nor even admit as probable excuse,
Right reading of the riddle, — as I urged
In my first argument, with fruit perhaps —
That what the owl-like eyes (at back of head!)
O' the driver, drowsed by driving night and day,
Supposed a vulgar interchange of lips,
This was but innocent jog of head 'gainst head,
Cheek meeting jowl as apple may touch pear
From branch and branch contiguous in the wind,
When Autumn blusters and the orchard rocks: —
That rapid run and the rough road were cause
O' the casual ambiguity, no harm

I' the world to eyes awake and penetrative: —
Say, — not to grasp a truth I can release
And safely fight without, yet conquer still, —
Say, she kissed him, say, he kissed her again!
Such osculation was a potent means,
A very efficacious help, no doubt:
Such with a third part of her nectar did
Venus imbue: why should Pompilia fling
The poet's declaration in his teeth? —
Pause to employ what, — since it had success,
And kept the priest her servant to the end, —
We must presume of energy enough,
No whit superfluous, so permissible?

The goal is gained: day, night, and yet a day
Have run their round: a long and devious road
Is traversed, — many manners, various men
Passed in review, what cities did they see,
What hamlets mark, what profitable food
For after-meditation cull and store!
Till Rome, that Rome whereof — this voice
Would it might make our Molinists observe,
That she is built upon a rock nor shall
Their powers prevail against her! — Rome, I say,
Is all but reached; one stage more and they stop
Saved: pluck up heart, ye pair, and forward, then!

Ah, Nature — baffled she recurs, alas!
Nature imperiously exacts her due,
Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak:
Pompilia needs must acquiesce and swoon,
Give hopes alike and fears a breathing-while.
The innocent sleep soundly: sound she sleeps,
So let her slumber, then, unguarded save
By her own chastity, a triple mail,
And his good hand whose stalwart arms have borne
The sweet and senseless burden like a babe
From coach to couch, — the serviceable strength!
Nay, what and if he gazed rewardedly
On the pale beauty prisoned in embrace,
Stooped over, stole a balmy breath perhaps
For more assurance sleep was not decease —
"*Ut vidi,*" "how I saw!" succeeded by
"*Ut perii,*" "how I sudden lost my brains!"
— What harm ensued to her unconscious quite?
For, curiosity — how natural!

Importunateness — what a privilege
In the ardent sex! And why curb ardor here?
How can the priest but pity whom he saved?
And pity is so near to love, and love
So neighborly to all unreasonableness!
As to love's object, whether love were sage
Or foolish, could Pompilia know or care,
Being still sound asleep, as I premised?
Thus the philosopher absorbed by thought,
Even Archimedes, busy o'er a book
The while besiegers sacked his Syracuse,
Was ignorant of the imminence o' the point
O' the sword till it surprised him: let it stab,
And never knew himself was dead at all.
So sleep thou on, secure whate'er betide!
For thou, too, hast thy problem hard to solve —
How so much beauty is compatible
With so much innocence!

Fit place, methinks,
While in this task she rosily is lost,
To treat of and repel objection here
Which, — frivolous, I grant, — my mind misgives,
May somehow still have flitted, gadfly-like,
And teased the Court at times — as if, all said
And done, there seemed, the Court might nearly say,
In a certain acceptation, somewhat more
Of what may pass for insincerity,
Falsehood, throughout the course Pompilia took,
Than befits Christian. Pagans held, we know,
Man always ought to aim at good and truth,
Not always put one thing in the same words:
Non idem semper dicere sed spectare
Debemus. But the Pagan yoke was light;
"Lie not at all," the exacter precept bids:
Each least lie breaks the law, — is sin, we hold.
I humble me, but venture to submit —
What prevents sin, itself is sinless, sure:
And sin, which hinders sin of deeper dye,
Softens itself away by contrast so.
Conceive me! Little sin, by none at all,
Were properly condemned for great: but great,
By greater, dwindles into small again.
Now, what is greatest sin of womanhood?
That which unwomans it, abolishes
The nature of the woman, — impudence.

Who contradicts me here? Concede me, then,
Whatever friendly fault may interpose
To save the sex from self-abolishment
Is three-parts on the way to virtue's rank!
And, what is taxed here as duplicity,
Feint, wile, and trick, — admitted for the nonce, —
What worse do one and all than interpose,
Hold, as it were, a deprecating hand,
Statuesquely, in the Medicean mode,
Before some shame which modesty would veil?
Who blames the gesture prettily perverse?
Thus, — lest ye miss a point illustrative, —
Admit the husband's calumny — allow
That the wife, having penned the epistle fraught
With horrors, charge on charge of crime she heaped
O' the head of Pietro and Violante — (still
Presumed her parents) — having dispatched the same
To their arch-enemy Paolo, through free choice
And no sort of compulsion in the world —
Put case she next discards simplicity
For craft, denies the voluntary act,
Declares herself a passive instrument
I' the husband's hands; that, duped by knavery,
She traced the characters she could not write,
And took on trust the unread sense which, read,
And recognized were to be spurned at once:
Allow this calumny, I reiterate!
Who is so dull as wonder at the pose
Of our Pompilia in the circumstance?
Who sees not that the too-ingenuous soul,
Repugnant even at a duty done
Which brought beneath too scrutinizing glare
The misdemeanors, — buried in the dark, —
Of the authors of her being, as believed, —
Stung to the quick at her impulsive deed,
And willing to repair what harm it worked,
She — wise in this beyond what Nero proved,
Who, when folk urged the candid juvenile
To sign the warrant, doom the guilty dead,
"Would I had never learned to write!" quoth he!
— Pompilia rose above the Roman, cried,
"To read or write I never learned at all!"
O splendidly mendacious!

But time fleets:
Let us not linger: hurry to the end,

Since flight does end and that, disastrously.
Beware ye blame desert for unsuccess,
Disparage each expedient else to praise,
Call failure folly! Man's best effort fails.
After ten years' resistance Troy succumbed:
Could valor save a town, Troy still had stood.
Pompilia came off halting in no point
Of courage, conduct, her long journey through:
But nature sank exhausted at the close,
And, as I said, she swooned and slept all night.
Morn breaks and brings the husband: we assist
At the spectacle. Discovery succeeds.
Ha, how is this? What moonstruck rage is here?
Though we confess to partial frailty now,
To error in a woman and a wife,
Is 't by the rough way she shall be reclaimed?
Who bursts upon her chambered privacy?
What crowd profanes the chaste *cubiculum?*
What outcries and lewd laughter, scurril gibe
And ribald jest to scare the ministrant
Good angels that commerce with souls in sleep?
Why, had the worst crowned Guido to his wish,
Confirmed his most irrational surmise,
Yet there be bounds to man's emotion, checks
To an immoderate astonishment.
'T is decent horror, regulated wrath,
Befit our dispensation: have we back
The old Pagan license? Shall a Vulcan clap
His net o' the sudden and expose the pair
To the unquenchable universal mirth?
A feat, antiquity saw scandal in
So clearly, that the nauseous tale thereof —
Demodocus his nugatory song —
Hath ever been concluded modern stuff
Impossible to the mouth of the grave Muse,
So, foisted into that Eighth Odyssey
By some impertinent pickthank. O thou fool,
Count Guido Franceschini, what didst gain
By publishing thy secret to the world?
Were all the precepts of the wise a waste —
Bred in thee not one touch of reverence?
Admit thy wife — admonish we the fool —
Were falseness' self, why chronicle thy shame?
Much rather should thy teeth bite out thy tongue,
Dumb lip consort with desecrated brow,
Silence become historiographer,

And thou — thine own Cornelius Tacitus!
But virtue, barred, still leaps the barrier, lords!
— Still, moon-like, penetrates the encroaching mist
And bursts, all broad and bare, on night, ye know!
Surprised, then, in the garb of truth, perhaps,
Pompilia, thus opposed, breaks obstacle,
Springs to her feet, and stands Thalassian-pure,
Confronts the foe, — nay, catches at his sword
And tries to kill the intruder, he complains.
Why, so she gave her lord his lesson back,
Crowned him, this time, the virtuous woman's way,
With an exact obedience; he brought sword,
She drew the same, since swords are meant to draw.
Tell not me 't is sharp play with tools on edge!
It was the husband chose the weapon here.
Why did not he inaugurate the game
With some gentility of apophthegm
Still pregnant on the philosophic page,
Some captivating cadence still a-lisp
O' the poet's lyre? Such spells subdue the surge,
Make tame the tempest, much more mitigate
The passions of the mind, and probably
Had moved Pompilia to a smiling blush.
No, he must needs prefer the argument
O' the blow: and she obeyed, in duty bound,
Returned him buffet ratiocinative —
Ay, in the reasoner's own interest,
For wife must follow whither husband leads,
Vindicate honor as himself prescribes,
Save him the very way himself bids save!
No question but who jumps into a quag
Should stretch forth hand and pray us "Pull me out
By the hand!" such were the customary cry:
But Guido pleased to bid "Leave hand alone!
Join both feet, rather, jump upon my head:
I extricate myself by the rebound!"
And dutifully as enjoined she jumped —
Drew his own sword and menaced his own life,
Anything to content a wilful spouse.

And so he was contented — one must do
Justice to the expedient which succeeds,
Strange as it seem: at flourish of the blade,
The crowd drew back, stood breathless and abashed,
Then murmured, "This should be no wanton wife,
No conscience-stricken sinner, caught i' the act,

And patiently awaiting our first stone:
But a poor hard-pressed all-bewildered thing,
Has rushed so far, misguidedly perhaps,
Meaning no more harm than a frightened sheep.
She sought for aid; and if she made mistake
I' the man could aid most, why — so mortals do:
Even the blessed Magdalen mistook
Far less forgivably: consult the place —
Supposing him to be the gardener,
'Sir,' said she, and so following." Why more words?
Forthwith the wife is pronounced innocent:
What would the husband more than gain his cause,
And find that honor flash in the world's eye,
His apprehension was lest soil had smirched?

So, happily the adventure comes to close
Whereon my fat opponent grounds his charge
Preposterous: at mid-day he groans "How dark!"
Listen to me, thou Archangelic swine!
Where is the ambiguity to blame,
The flaw to find in our Pompilia? Safe
She stands, see! Does thy comment follow quick,
"Safe, inasmuch as at the end proposed;
But thither she picked way by devious path —
Stands dirtied, no dubiety at all!
I recognize success, yet, all the same,
Importunately will suggestion prompt —
Better Pompilia gained the right to boast,
'No devious path, no doubtful patch was mine,
I saved my head nor sacrificed my foot!'
Why, being in a peril, show mistrust
Of the angels set to guard the innocent?
Why rather hold by obvious vulgar help
Of stratagem and subterfuge, excused
Somewhat, but still no less a foil, a fault,
Since low with high, and good with bad is linked?
Methinks I view some ancient bas-relief.
There stands Hesione thrust out by Troy,
Her father's hand has chained her to a crag,
Her mother's from the virgin plucked the vest,
At a safe distance both distressful watch,
While near and nearer comes the snorting orc.
I look that, white and perfect to the end,
She wait till Jove dispatch some demigod;
Not that, — impatient of celestial club
Alcmena's son should brandish at the beast, —

She daub, disguise her dainty limbs with pitch,
And so elude the purblind monster! Ay,
The trick succeeds, but 't is an ugly trick,
Where needs have been no trick!"

My answer? Faugh
Nimis incongrue! Too absurdly put!
Sententiam ego teneo contrariam,
Trick, I maintain, had no alternative.
The heavens were bound with brass,—Jove far at feast
(No feast like that thou didst not ask me to,
Arcangeli,—I heard of thy regale!)
With the unblamed Æthiop,—Hercules spun wool
I' the lap of Omphale, while Virtue shrieked—
The brute came paddling all the faster. You
Of Troy, who stood at distance, where 's the aid
You offered in the extremity? Most and least,
Gentle and simple, here the Governor,
There the Archbishop, everywhere the friends,
Shook heads and waited for a miracle,
Or went their way, left Virtue to her fate.
Just this one rough and ready man leapt forth!
—Was found, sole anti-Fabius (dare I say)
Who restored things, with no delay at all,
Qui haud cunctando rem restituit! He,
He only, Caponsacchi 'mid a crowd,
Caught Virtue up, carried Pompilia off
Through gaping impotence of sympathy
In ranged Arezzo: what you take for pitch,
Is nothing worse, belike, than black and blue,
Mere evanescent proof that hardy hands
Did yeoman's service, cared not where the gripe
Was more than duly energetic: bruised,
She smarts a little, but her bones are saved
A fracture, and her skin will soon show sleek.
How it disgusts when weakness, false-refined,
Censures the honest rude effective strength,—
When sickly dreamers of the impossible
Decry plain sturdiness which does the feat
With eyes wide open!

Did occasion serve,
I could illustrate, if my lords allow;
Quid vetat, what forbids I aptly ask
With Horace, that I give my anger vent,
While I let breathe, no less, and recreate,
The gravity of my Judges, by a tale?

A case in point — what though an apologue
Graced by tradition? — possibly a fact:
Tradition must precede all scripture, words
Serve as our warrant ere our books can be:
So, to tradition back we needs must go
For any fact's authority: and this
Hath lived so far (like jewel hid in muck)
On page of that old lying vanity
Called "Sepher Toldoth Yeschu:" God be praised,
I read no Hebrew, — take the thing on trust:
But I believe the writer meant no good
(Blind as he was to truth in some respects)
To our pestiferous and schismatic . . . well,
My lords' conjecture be the touchstone, show
The thing for what it is! The author lacks
Discretion, and his zeal exceeds: but zeal, —
How rare in our degenerate day! Enough!
Here is the story: fear not, I shall chop
And change a little, else my Jew would press
All too unmannerly before the Court.

It happened once, — begins this foolish Jew,
Pretending to write Christian history, —
That three, held greatest, best and worst of men,
Peter and John and Judas, spent a day
In toil and travel through the country-side
On some sufficient business — I suspect,
Suppression of some Molinism i' the bud.
Foot-sore and hungry, dropping with fatigue,
They reached by nightfall a poor lonely grange,
Hostel or inn: so, knocked and entered there.
"Your pleasure, great ones?" — "Shelter, rest and food!"
For shelter, there was one bare room above;
For rest therein, three beds of bundled straw:
For food, one wretched starveling fowl, no more —
Meat for one mouth, but mockery for three.
"You have my utmost." How should supper serve?
Peter broke silence: "To the spit with fowl!
And while 't is cooking, sleep! — since beds there be,
And, so far, satisfaction of a want.
Sleep we an hour, awake at supper-time,
Then each of us narrate the dream he had,
And he whose dream shall prove the happiest, point
The clearliest out the dreamer as ordained
Beyond his fellows to receive the fowl,
Him let our shares be cheerful tribute to,

His the entire meal, may it do him good!"
Who could dispute so plain a consequence?
So said, so done: each hurried to his straw,
Slept his hour's-sleep and dreamed his dream, and woke.
"I," commenced John, "dreamed that I gained the prize
We all aspire to: the proud place was mine,
Throughout the earth and to the end of time
I was the Loved Disciple: mine the meal!"
"But I," proceeded Peter, "dreamed, a word
Gave me the headship of our company,
Made me the Vicar and Vice-gerent, gave
The keys of heaven and hell into my hand,
And o'er the earth, dominion: mine the meal!"
"While I," submitted in soft under-tone
The Iscariot — sense of his unworthiness
Turning each eye up to the inmost white —
With long-drawn sigh, yet letting both lips smack,
"I have had just the pitifullest dream
That ever proved man meanest of his mates,
And born foot-washer and foot-wiper, nay
Foot-kisser to each comrade of you all!
I dreamed I dreamed; and in that mimic dream
(Impalpable to dream as dream to fact)
Methought I meanly chose to sleep no wink
But wait until I heard my brethren snore;
Then stole from couch, slipped noiseless o'er the planks,
Slid downstairs, furtively approached the hearth,
Found the fowl duly brown, both back and breast,
Hissing in harmony with the cricket's chirp,
Grilled to a point; said no grace but fell to,
Nor finished till the skeleton lay bare.
In penitence for which ignoble dream,
Lo, I renounce my portion cheerfully!
Fie on the flesh — be mine the ethereal gust,
And yours the sublunary sustenance!
See that whate'er be left ye give the poor!"
Down the two scuttled, one on other's heel,
Stung by a fell surmise; and found, alack,
A goodly savor, both the drumstick bones,
And that which henceforth took the appropriate name
O' the Merry-thought, in memory of the fact
That to keep wide awake is man's best dream.

So, — as was said once of Thucydides
And his sole joke, "The lion, lo, hath laughed!" —
Just so, the Governor and all that 's great

I' the city, never meant that Innocence
Should quite starve while Authority sat at meat;
They meant to fling a bone at banquet's end:
Wished well to our Pompilia — in their dreams,
Nor bore the secular sword in vain — asleep.
Just so the Archbishop and all good like him
Went to bed meaning to pour oil and wine
I' the wounds of her, next day, — but long ere day,
They had burned the one and drunk the other, while
Just so, again, contrariwise, the priest
Sustained poor Nature in extremity
By stuffing barley-bread into her mouth,
Saving Pompilia (grant the parallel)
By the plain homely and straightforward way
Taught him by common sense. Let others shriek
"Oh what refined expedients did we dream
Proved us the only fit to help the fair!"
He cried, "A carriage waits, jump in with me!"

And now, this application pardoned, lords, —
This recreative pause and breathing-while, —
Back to beseemingness and gravity!
For Law steps in: Guido appeals to Law,
Demands she arbitrate, — does well for once.
O Law, of thee how neatly was it said
By that old Sophocles, thou hast thy seat
I' the very breast of Jove, no meanlier throned!
Here is a piece of work now, hitherto
Begun and carried on, concluded near,
Without an eye-glance cast thy sceptre's way;
And, lo, the stumbling and discomfiture!
Well may you call them "lawless" means, men take
To extricate themselves through mother-wit
When tangled haply in the toils of life!
Guido would try conclusions with his foe,
Whoe'er the foe was and whate'er the offence;
He would recover certain dowry-dues:
Instead of asking Law to lend a hand,
What pother of sword drawn and pistol cocked,
What peddling with forged letters and paid spies,
Politic circumvention! — all to end
As it began — by loss of the fool's head,
First in a figure, presently in a fact.
It is a lesson to mankind at large.
How other were the end, would men be sage
And bear confidingly each quarrel straight,

O Law, to thy recipient mother-knees!
How would the children light come and prompt go,
This, with a red-cheeked apple for reward,
The other, peradventure red-cheeked too
I' the rear, by taste of birch for punishment.
No foolish brawling murder any more!
Peace for the household, practice for the Fisc,
And plenty for the exchequer of my lords!
Too much to hope, in this world: in the next,
Who knows? Since, why should sit the Twelve enthroned
To judge the tribes, unless the tribes be judged?
And 't is impossible but offences come:
So, all 's one lawsuit, all one long leet-day!

Forgive me this digression — that I stand
Entranced awhile at Law's first beam, outbreak
O' the business, when the Count's good angel bade
"Put up thy sword, born enemy to the ear,
And let Law listen to thy difference!"
And Law does listen and compose the strife,
Settle the suit, how wisely and how well!
On our Pompilia, faultless to a fault,
Law bends a brow maternally severe,
Implies the worth of perfect chastity,
By fancying the flaw she cannot find.
Superfluous sifting snow, nor helps nor harms:
'T is safe to censure levity in youth,
Tax womanhood with indiscretion, sure!
Since toys, permissible to-day, become
Follies to-morrow: prattle shocks in church:
And that curt skirt which lets a maiden skip,
The matron changes for a trailing robe.
Mothers may aim a blow with half-shut eyes
Nodding above their spindles by the fire,
And chance to hit some hidden fault, else safe
Just so, Law hazarded a punishment —
If applicable to the circumstance,
Why, well! if not so apposite, well too.
"Quit the gay range o' the world," I hear her cry,
"Enter, in lieu, the penitential pound:
Exchange the gauds of pomp for ashes, dust!
Leave each mollitious haunt of luxury!
The golden-garnished silken-couched alcove,
The many-columned terrace that so tempts
Feminine soul put foot forth, extend ear
To fluttering joy of lover's serenade, —

Leave these for cellular seclusion! mask
And dance no more, but fast and pray! avaunt —
Be burned, thy wicked townsman's sonnet-book!
Welcome, mild hymnal by . . . some better scribe!
For the warm arms were wont enfold thy flesh,
Let wire-shirt plough and whip-cord discipline!"
If such an exhortation proved, perchance,
Inapplicable, words bestowed in waste,
What harm, since Law has store, can spend nor miss?

And so, our paragon submits herself,
Goes at command into the holy house,
And, also at command, comes out again:
For, could the effect of such obedience prove
Too certain, too immediate? Being healed,
Go blaze abroad the matter, blessed one!
Art thou sound forthwith? Speedily vacate
The step by pool-side, leave Bethesda free
To patients plentifully posted round,
Since the whole need not the physician! Brief,
She may betake her to her parents' place.
Welcome her, father, with wide arms once more;
Motion her, mother, to thy breast again!
For why? Since Law relinquishes the charge,
Grants to your dwelling-place a prison's style,
Rejoice you with Pompilia! golden days,
Redeunt Saturnia regna. Six weeks slip,
And she is domiciled in house and home
As though she thence had never budged at all.
And thither let the husband — joyous, ay,
But contrite also — quick betake himself,
Proud that his dove which lay among the pots
Hath mued those dingy feathers, — moulted now,
Shows silver bosom clothed with yellow gold!
So shall he tempt her to the perch she fled,
Bid to domestic bliss the truant back.

But let him not delay! Time fleets how fast,
And opportunity, the irrevocable,
Once flown will flout him! Is the furrow traced?
If field with corn ye fail preoccupy,
Darnel for wheat and thistle-beards for grain,
Infelix lolium, carduus horridus,
Will grow apace in combination prompt,
Defraud the husbandman of his desire.
Already — hist — what murmurs 'monish now

The laggard? — doubtful, nay, fantastic bruit
Of such an apparition, such return
Interdum, to anticipate the spouse,
Of Caponsacchi's very self! 'T is said,
When nights are lone and company is rare,
His visitations brighten winter up.
If so they did — which nowise I believe —
(How can I? — proof abounding that the priest,
Once fairly at his relegation-place,
Never once left it), still, admit he stole
A midnight march, would fain see friend again,
Find matter for instruction in the past,
Renew the old adventure in such chat
As cheers a fireside! He was lonely too,
He, too, must need his recreative hour.
Shall it amaze the philosophic mind
If he, long wont the empurpled cup to quaff,
Have feminine society at will,
Being debarred abruptly from all drink
Save at the spring which Adam used for wine,
Dreads harm to just the health he hoped to guard,
And, trying abstinence, gains malady?
Ask Tozzi, now physician to the Pope!
"Little by little break" — (I hear he bids
Master Arcangeli my antagonist,
Who loves good cheer, and may indulge too much:
So I explain the logic of the plea
Wherewith he opened our proceedings late) —
"Little by little break a habit, Don,
Become necessity to feeble flesh!"
And thus, nocturnal taste of intercourse
(Which never happened, — but, suppose it did)
May have been used to dishabituate
By sip and sip this drainer to the dregs
O' the draught of conversation, — heady stuff,
Brewage which, broached, it took two days and nights
To properly discuss i' the journey, Sirs!
Such power has second-nature, men call use,
That undelightful objects get to charm
Instead of chafe: the daily colocynth
Tickles the palate by repeated dose,
Old sores scratch kindly, the ass makes a push
Although the mill-yoke-wound be smarting yet,
For mill-door bolted on a holiday:
Nor must we marvel here if impulse urge
To talk the old story over now and then,

The hopes and fears, the stoppage and the haste, —
Subjects of colloquy to surfeit once.
"Here did you bid me twine a rosy wreath!"
"And there you paid my lips a compliment!"
"Here you admired the tower could be so tall!"
"And there you likened that of Lebanon
To the nose of the beloved!" Trifles! still,
"*Forsan et hæc olim*," — such trifles serve
To make the minutes pass in winter-time.

Husband, return then, I re-counsel thee!
For, finally, of all glad circumstance
Should make a prompt return imperative,
What in the world awaits thee, dost suppose?
O' the sudden, as good gifts are wont befall,
What is the hap of our unconscious Count?
That which lights bonfire and sets cask a-tilt,
Dissolves the stubborn'st heart in jollity.
O admirable, there is born a babe,
A son, an heir, a Franceschini last
And best o' the stock! Pompilia, thine the palm!
Repaying incredulity with faith,
Ungenerous thrift of each marital debt
With bounty in profuse expenditure,
Pompilia scorns to have the old year end
Without a present shall ring in the new —
Bestows on her too-parsimonious lord
An infant for the apple of his eye,
Core of his heart, and crown completing life,
True *summum bonum* of the earthly lot!
"We," saith ingeniously the sage, "are born
Solely that others may be born of us."
So, father, take thy child, for thine that child,
Oh nothing doubt! In wedlock born, law holds
Baseness impossible: since "*filius est*
Quem nuptiæ demonstrant," twits the text
Whoever dares to doubt.

Yet doubt he dares!
O faith, where art thou flown from out the world?
Already on what an age of doubt we fall!
Instead of each disputing for the prize,
The babe is bandied here from that to this.
Whose the babe? "*Cujum pecus?*" Guido's lamb?
"*An Melibœi?*" Nay, but of the priest!
"*Non sed Ægonis!*" Some one must be sire:

And who shall say, in such a puzzling strait,
If there were not vouchsafed some miracle
To the wife who had been harassed and abused
More than enough by Guido's family
For non-production of the promised fruit
Of marriage? What if Nature, I demand,
Touched to the quick by taunts upon her sloth,
Had roused herself, put forth recondite power,
Bestowed this birth to vindicate her sway,
Like the strange favor, Maro memorized
As granted Aristæus when his hive
Lay empty of the swarm? not one more bee —
Not one more babe to Franceschini's house!
And lo, a new birth filled the air with joy,
Sprung from the bowels of the generous steer,
A novel son and heir rejoiced the Count!
Spontaneous generation, need I prove
Were facile feat to Nature at a pinch?
Let whoso doubts, steep horsehair certain weeks,
In water, there will be produced a snake;
Spontaneous product of the horse, which horse
Happens to be the representative —
Now that I think on 't — of Arezzo's self,
The very city our conception blessed:
Is not a prancing horse the City-arms?
What sane eye fails to see coincidence?
Cur ego, boast thou, my Pompilia, then,
Desperem fieri sine conjuge
Mater — how well the Ovidian distich suits! —
Et parere intacto dummodo
Casta viro? such miracle was wrought!
Note, further, as to mark the prodigy,
The babe in question neither took the name
Of Guido, from the sire presumptive, nor
Giuseppe, from the sire potential, but
Gaetano — last saint of our hierarchy,
And newest namer for a thing so new!
What other motive could have prompted choice?

Therefore be peace again: exult, ye hills!
Ye vales rejoicingly break forth in song!
Incipe, parve puer, begin, small boy,
Risu cognoscere patrem, with a laugh
To recognize thy parent! Nor do thou
Boggle, oh parent, to return the grace!
Nec anceps hære, pater, puero

Cognoscendo — one may well eke out the prayer!
In vain! The perverse Guido doubts his eyes,
Distrusts assurance, lets the devil drive.
Because his house is swept and garnished now,
He, having summoned seven like himself,
Must hurry thither, knock and enter in,
And make the last worse than the first, indeed!
Is he content? We are. No further blame
O' the man and murder! They were stigmatized
Befittingly: the Court heard long ago
My mind o' the matter, which, outpouring full,
Has long since swept like surge, i' the simile
Of Homer, overborne both dyke and dam,
And whelmed alike client and advocate:
His fate is sealed, his life as good as gone,
On him I am not tempted to waste word.
Yet though my purpose holds, — which was and is
And solely shall be to the very end,
To draw the true *effigies* of a saint,
Do justice to perfection in the sex, —
Yet let not some gross pamperer of the flesh
And niggard in the spirit's nourishment,
Whose feeding hath obfuscated his wit
Rather than law, — he never had, to lose —
Let not such advocate object to me
I leave my proper function of attack!
"What 's this to Bacchus?" — (in the classic phrase,
Well used, for once) he hiccups probably.
O Advocate o' the Poor, thou born to make
Their blessing void — *beati pauperes!*
By painting saintship I depicture sin:
Beside my pearl, I prove how black thy jet,
And, through Pompilia's virtue, Guido's crime.

Back to her, then, — with but one beauty more,
End we our argument, — one crowning grace
Pre-eminent 'mid agony and death.
For to the last Pompilia played her part,
Used the right means to the permissible end,
And, wily as an eel that stirs the mud
Thick overhead, so baffling spearman's thrust,
She, while he stabbed her, simulated death,
Delayed, for his sake, the catastrophe,
Obtained herself a respite, four days' grace,
Whereby she told her story to the world,
Enabled me to make the present speech,
And, by a full confession, saved her soul.

Yet hold, even here would malice leer its last,
Gurgle its choked remonstrance: snake, hiss free!
Oh, that's the objection? And to whom? — not her
But me, forsooth — as, in the very act
Of both confession and (what followed close)
Subsequent talk, chatter and gossipry,
Babble to sympathizing he and she
Whoever chose besiege her dying-bed, —
As this were found at variance with my tale,
Falsified all I have adduced for truth,
Admitted not one peccadillo here,
Pretended to perfection, first and last,
O' the whole procedure — perfect in the end,
Perfect i' the means, perfect in everything,
Leaving a lawyer nothing to excuse,
Reason away and show his skill about!
— A flight, impossible to Adamic flesh,
Just to be fancied, scarcely to be wished,
And, anyhow, unpleadable in court!
"How reconcile," gasps Malice, "that with this?"

Your "this," friend, is extraneous to the law,
Comes of men's outside meddling, the unskilled
Interposition of such fools as press
Out of their province. Must I speak my mind?
Far better had Pompilia died o' the spot
Than found a tongue to wag and shame the law,
Shame most of all herself, — could friendship fail,
And advocacy lie less on the alert:
But no, they shall protect her to the end!
Do I credit the alleged narration? No!
Lied our Pompilia then, to laud herself?
Still, no! Clear up what seems discrepancy?
The means abound: art's long, though time is short;
So, keeping me in compass, all I urge
Is — since, confession at the point of death,
Nam in articulo mortis, with the Church
Passes for statement honest and sincere,
Nemo presumitur reus esse, — then,
If sure that all affirmed would be believed,
'T was charity, in her so circumstanced,
To spend the last breath in one effort more
For universal good of friend and foe:
And, — by pretending utter innocence,
Nay, freedom from each foible we forgive, —
Re-integrate — not solely her own fame,

But do the like kind office for the priest
Whom telling the crude truth about might vex,
Haply expose to peril, abbreviate
Indeed the long career of usefulness
Presumably before him: while her lord,
Whose fleeting life is forfeit to the law,—
What mercy to the culprit if, by just
The gift of such a full certificate
Of his immitigable guiltiness,
She stifled in him the absurd conceit
Of murder as it were a mere revenge
—Stopped confirmation of that jealousy
Which, did she but acknowledge the first flaw,
The faintest foible, had emboldened him
To battle with the charge, balk penitence,
Bar preparation for impending fate!
Whereas, persuade him that he slew a saint
Who sinned not even where she may have sinned,
You urge him all the brisklier to repent
Of most and least and aught and everything!
Still, if this view of mine content you not,
Lords, nor excuse the genial falsehood here,
We come to our *Triarii*, last resource:
We fall back on the inexpugnable,
Submitting,—she confessed before she talked!
The sacrament obliterates the sin:
What is not,—was not, therefore, in a sense.
Let Molinists distinguish, "Souls washed white
But red once, still show pinkish to the eye!"
We say, abolishment is nothingness,
And nothingness has neither head nor tail,
End nor beginning! Better estimate
Exorbitantly, than disparage aught
Of the efficacity of the act, I hope!

Solvuntur tabulæ? May we laugh and go?
Well,—not before (in filial gratitude
To Law, who, mighty mother, waves adieu)
We take on us to vindicate Law's self!
For,—yea, Sirs,—curb the start, curtail the stare!—
Remains that we apologize for haste
I' the Law, our lady who here bristles up,
"Blame my procedure? Could the Court mistake?
(Which were indeed a misery to think);
Did not my sentence in the former stage
O' the business bear a title plain enough?

Decretum" — I translate it word for word —
"'Decreed: the priest, for his complicity
I' the flight and deviation of the dame,
As well as for unlawful intercourse,
Is banished three years:' crime and penalty,
Declared alike. If he be taxed with guilt,
How can you call Pompilia innocent?
If both be innocent, have I been just?"

Gently, O mother, judge men — whose mistake
Is in the mere misapprehensiveness!
The *Titulus* a-top of your decree
Was but to ticket there the kind of charge
You in good time would arbitrate upon.
Title is one thing, — arbitration's self,
Probatio, quite another possibly.
Subsistit, there holds good the old response,
Responsio tradita, we must not stick,
Quod non sit attendendus Titulus,
To the Title, *sed Probatio*, but the Proof,
Resultans ex processu, the result
O' the Trial, and the style of punishment,
Et pœna per sententiam imposita.
All is tentative, till the sentence come:
An indication of what men expect,
But nowise an assurance they shall find.
Lords, what if we permissibly relax
The tense bow, as the law-god Phœbus bids,
Relieve our gravity at labor's close?
I traverse Rome, feel thirsty, need a draught,
Look for a wine-shop, find it by the bough
Projecting as to say "Here wine is sold!"
So much I know, — "sold:" but what sort of wine?
Strong, weak, sweet, sour, home-made or foreign drink?
That much must I discover by myself.
"Wine is sold," quoth the bough, "but good or bad,
Find, and inform us when you smack your lips!"
Exactly so, Law hangs her title forth,
To show she entertains you with such case
About such crime. Come in! she pours, you quaff.
You find the Priest good liquor in the main,
But heady and provocative of brawls:
Remand the residue to flask once more,
Lay it low where it may deposit lees,
I' the cellar: thence produce it presently,
Three years the brighter and the better!

Thus,
Law's son, have I bestowed my filial help,
And thus I end, *tenax proposito ;*
Point to point as I purposed have I drawn
Pompilia, and implied as terribly
Guido : so, gazing, let the world crown Law —
Able once more, despite my impotence,
And helped by the acumen of the Court,
To eliminate, display, make triumph truth !
What other prize than truth were worth the pains ?

There 's my oration — much exceeds in length
That famed panegyric of Isocrates,
They say it took him fifteen years to pen.
But all those ancients could say anything !
He put in just what rushed into his head :
While I shall have to prune and pare and print.
This comes of being born in modern times
With priests for auditory. Still, it pays.

X.

THE POPE.

LIKE to Ahasuerus, that shrewd prince,
I will begin, — as is, these seven years now,
My daily wont, — and read a History
(Written by one whose deft right hand was dust
To the last digit, ages ere my birth)
Of all my predecessors, Popes of Rome:
For though mine ancient early dropped the pen,
Yet others picked it up and wrote it dry,
Since of the making books there is no end.
And so I have the Papacy complete
From Peter first to Alexander last;
Can question each and take instruction so.
Have I to dare? — I ask, how dared this Pope?
To suffer? Such-an-one, how suffered he?
Being about to judge, as now, I seek
How judged once, well or ill, some other Pope;
Study some signal judgment that subsists
To blaze on, or else blot, the page which seals
The sum up of what gain or loss to God
Came of His one more Vicar in the world.
So, do I find example, rule of life;
So, square and set in order the next page,
Shall be stretched smooth o'er my own funeral cyst.

Eight hundred years exact before the year
I was made Pope, men made Formosus Pope,
Say Sigebert and other chroniclers.
Ere I confirm or quash the Trial here
Of Guido Franceschini and his friends,
Read, — How there was a ghastly Trial once
Of a dead man by a live man, and both, Popes:
Thus — in the antique penman's very phrase.

"Then Stephen, Pope and seventh of the name,
Cried out, in synod as he sat in state,
While choler quivered on his brow and beard,

'Come into court, Formosus, thou lost wretch,
That claimedst to be late Pope as even I!'

"And at the word, the great door of the church
Flew wide, and in they brought Formosus' self,
The body of him, dead, even as embalmed
And buried duly in the Vatican
Eight months before, exhumed thus for the nonce.
They set it, that dead body of a Pope,
Clothed in pontific vesture now again,
Upright on Peter's chair as if alive.

"And Stephen, springing up, cried furiously,
'Bishop of Porto, wherefore didst presume
To leave that see and take this Roman see,
Exchange the lesser for the greater see,
— A thing against the canons of the Church?'

"Then one — (a Deacon who, observing forms,
Was placed by Stephen to repel the charge,
Be advocate and mouthpiece of the corpse) —
Spoke as he dared, set stammeringly forth
With white lips and dry tongue, — as but a youth,
For frightful was the corpse-face to behold, —
How nowise lacked there precedent for this.

"But when, for his last precedent of all,
Emboldened by the Spirit, out he blurts,
'And, Holy Father, didst not thou thyself
Vacate the lesser for the greater see,
Half a year since change Arago for Rome?'
'— Ye have the sin's defence now, synod mine!'
Shrieks Stephen in a beastly froth of rage:
'Judge now betwixt him dead and me alive!
Hath he intruded, or do I pretend?
Judge, judge!' — breaks wavelike one whole foam of wrath.

"Whereupon they, being friends and followers,
Said, 'Ay, thou art Christ's Vicar, and not he!
Away with what is frightful to behold!
This act was uncanonic and a fault.'

"Then, swallowed up in rage, Stephen exclaimed,
'So, guilty! So, remains I punish guilt!
He is unpoped, and all he did I damn:
The Bishop, that ordained him, I degrade:

Depose to laics those he raised to priests:
What they have wrought is mischief nor shall stand,
It is confusion, let it vex no more!
Since I revoke, annul and abrogate
All his decrees in all kinds: they are void!
In token whereof and warning to the world,
Strip me yon miscreant of those robes usurped,
And clothe him with vile serge befitting such!
Then hale the carrion to the market-place;
Let the town-hangman chop from his right hand
Those same three fingers which he blessed withal;
Next cut the head off, once was crowned forsooth:
And last go fling them, fingers, head and trunk,
To Tiber that my Christian fish may sup!'
— Either because of ΙΧΘΥΣ which means Fish
And very aptly symbolizes Christ,
Or else because the Pope is Fisherman,
And seals with Fisher's-signet.

"Anyway,
So said, so done: himself, to see it done,
Followed the corpse they trailed from street to street
Till into Tiber wave they threw the thing.
The people, crowded on the banks to see,
Were loud or mute, wept or laughed, cursed or jeered,
According as the deed addressed their sense;
A scandal verily: and out spake a Jew,
'Wot ye your Christ had vexed our Herod thus?'

"Now when, Formosus being dead a year,
His judge Pope Stephen tasted death in turn,
Made captive by the mob and strangled straight,
Romanus, his successor for a month,
Did make protest Formosus was with God,
Holy, just, true in thought and word and deed.
Next Theodore, who reigned but twenty days,
Therein convoked a synod, whose decree
Did reinstate, repope the late unpoped,
And do away with Stephen as accursed.
So that when presently certain fisher-folk
(As if the queasy river could not hold
Its swallowed Jonas, but discharged the meal)
Produced the timely product of their nets,
The mutilated man, Formosus, — saved
From putrefaction by the embalmer's spice,
Or, as some said, by sanctity of flesh, —

'Why, lay the body again,' bade Theodore
'Among his predecessors, in the church
And burial-place of Peter!' which was done.
'And,' addeth Luitprand,'many of repute,
Pious and still alive, avouch to me
That, as they bore the body up the aisle,
The saints in imaged row bowed each his head
For welcome to a brother-saint come back.'
As for Romanus and this Theodore,
These two Popes, through the brief reign granted each,
Could but initiate what John came to close
And give the final stamp to: he it was,
Ninth of the name, (I follow the best guides)
Who,—in full synod at Ravenna held
With Bishops seventy-four, and present too
Eude King of France with his Archbishopry,—
Did condemn Stephen, anathematize
The disinterment, and make all blots blank.
'For,' argueth here Auxilius in a place
De Ordinationibus, 'precedents
Had been, no lack, before Formosus long,
Of Bishops so transferred from see to see,—
Marinus, for example:' read the tract.

"But, after John, came Sergius, reaffirmed
The right of Stephen, cursed Formosus, nay
Cast out, some say, his corpse a second time.
And here,—because the matter went to ground,
Fretted by new griefs, other cares of the age,—
Here is the last pronouncing of the Church,
Her sentence that subsists unto this day.
Yet constantly opinion hath prevailed
I' the Church, Formosus was a holy man."

Which of the judgments was infallible?
Which of my predecessors spoke for God?
And what availed Formosus that this cursed,
That blessed, and then this other cursed again?
"Fear ye not those whose power can kill the body
And not the soul," saith Christ, "but rather those
Can cast both soul and body into hell!"

John judged thus in Eight Hundred Ninety Eight,
Exact eight hundred years ago to-day
When, sitting in his stead, Vicegerent here,
I must give judgment on my own behoof.
So worked the predecessor: now, my turn!

In God's name! Once more on this earth of God's,
While twilight lasts and time wherein to work,
I take His staff with my uncertain hand,
And stay my six and fourscore years, my due
Labor and sorrow, on His judgment-seat,
And forthwith think, speak, act, in place of Him —
The Pope for Christ. Once more appeal is made
From man's assize to mine: I sit and see
Another poor weak trembling human wretch
Pushed by his fellows, who pretend the right,
Up to the gulf which, where I gaze, begins
From this world to the next, — gives way and way,
Just on the edge over the awful dark:
With nothing to arrest him but my feet.
He catches at me with convulsive face,
Cries "Leave to live the natural minute more!"
While hollowly the avengers echo "Leave?
None! So has he exceeded man's due share
In man's fit license, wrung by Adam's fall,
To sin and yet not surely die, — that we,
All of us sinful, all with need of grace,
All chary of our life, — the minute more
Or minute less of grace which saves a soul, —
Bound to make common cause with who craves time,
— We yet protest against the exorbitance
Of sin in this one sinner, and demand
That his poor sole remaining piece of time
Be plucked from out his clutch: put him to death!
Punish him now! As for the weal or woe
Hereafter, God grant mercy! Man be just,
Nor let the felon boast he went scot-free!"
And I am bound, the solitary judge,
To weigh the worth, decide upon the plea,
And either hold a hand out, or withdraw
A foot and let the wretch drift to the fall.
Ay, and while thus I dally, dare perchance
Put fancies for a comfort 'twixt this calm
And yonder passion that I have to bear, —
As if reprieve were possible for both
Prisoner and Pope, — how easy were reprieve!
A touch o' the hand-bell here, a hasty word
To those who wait, and wonder they wait long,
I' the passage there, and I should gain the life! —
Yea, though I flatter me with fancy thus,
I know it is but Nature's craven-trick.
The case is over, judgment at an end,

And all things done now and irrevocable:
A mere dead man is Franceschini here,
Even as Formosus centuries ago.
I have worn through this sombre wintry day,
With winter in my soul beyond the world's,
Over these dismalest of documents
Which drew night down on me ere eve befell, —
Pleadings and counter-pleadings, figure of fact
Beside fact's self, these summaries, to wit, —
How certain three were slain by certain five:
I read here why it was, and how it went,
And how the chief o' the five preferred excuse,
And how law rather chose defence should lie, —
What argument he urged by wary word
When free to play off wile, start subterfuge,
And what the unguarded groan told, torture's feat
When law grew brutal, outbroke, overbore
And glutted hunger on the truth, at last, —
No matter for the flesh and blood between.
All 's a clear rede and no more riddle now.
Truth, nowhere, lies yet everywhere in these —
Not absolutely in a portion, yet
Evolvable from the whole: evolved at last
Painfully, held tenaciously by me.
Therefore there is not any doubt to clear
When I shall write the brief word presently
And chink the hand-bell, which I pause to do.
Irresolute? Not I, more than the mound
With the pine-trees on it yonder! Some surmise,
Perchance, that since man's wit is fallible,
Mine may fail here? Suppose it so, — what then?
Say, — Guido, I count guilty, there 's no babe
So guiltless, for I misconceive the man!
What 's in the chance should move me from my mind?
If, as I walk in a rough country-side,
Peasants of mine cry, "Thou art he can help,
Lord of the land and counted wise to boot:
Look at our brother, strangling in his foam,
He fell so where we find him, — prove thy worth!"
I may presume, pronounce, "A frenzy-fit,
A falling-sickness or a fever-stroke!
Breathe a vein, copiously let blood at once!"
So perishes the patient, and anon
I hear my peasants — "All was error, lord!
Our story, thy prescription: for there crawled
In due time from our hapless brother's breast

The serpent which had stung him: bleeding slew
Whom a prompt cordial had restored to health."
What other should I say than "God so willed:
Mankind is ignorant, a man am I:
Call ignorance my sorrow not my sin!"
So and not otherwise, in after-time,
If some acuter wit, fresh probing, sound
This multifarious mass of words and deeds
Deeper, and reach through guilt to innocence,
I shall face Guido's ghost nor blench a jot.
"God who set me to judge thee, meted out
So much of judging faculty, no more:
Ask Him if I was slack in use thereof!"
I hold a heavier fault imputable
Inasmuch as I changed a chaplain once,
For no cause, — no, if I must bare my heart, —
Save that he snuffled somewhat saying mass.
For I am 'ware it is the seed of act,
God holds appraising in His hollow palm,
Not act grown great thence on the world below,
Leafage and branchage, vulgar eyes admire.
Therefore I stand on my integrity,
Nor fear at all: and if I hesitate,
It is because I need to breathe awhile,
Rest, as the human right allows, review
Intent the little seeds of act, my tree, —
The thought, which, clothed in deed, I give the world
At chink of bell and push of arrased door.

O pale departure, dim disgrace of day!
Winter's in wane, his vengeful worst art thou,
To dash the boldness of advancing March!
Thy chill persistent rain has purged our streets
Of gossipry; pert tongue and idle ear
By this, consort 'neath archway, portico.
But wheresoe'er Rome gathers in the gray,
Two names now snap and flash from mouth to mouth —
(Sparks, flint and steel strike) — Guido and the Pope.
By this same hour to-morrow eve — aha,
How do they call him? — the sagacious Swede
Who finds by figures how the chances prove,
Why one comes rather than another thing,
As, say, such dots turn up by throw of dice,
Or, if we dip in Virgil here and there
And prick for such a verse, when such shall point.
Take this Swede, tell him, hiding name and rank,

Two men are in our city this dull eve;
One doomed to death, — but hundreds in such plight
Slip aside, clean escape by leave of law
Which leans to mercy in this latter time;
Moreover in the plenitude of life
Is he, with strength of limb and brain adroit,
Presumably of service here: beside,
The man is noble, backed by nobler friends:
Nay, they so wish him well, the city's self
Makes common cause with who — house-magistrate,
Patron of hearth and home, domestic lord —
But ruled his own, let aliens cavil. Die?
He 'll bribe a jailer or break prison first!
Nay, a sedition may be helpful, give
Hint to the mob to batter wall, burn gate,
And bid the favorite malefactor march.
Calculate now these chances of escape!
"It is not probable, but well may be."
Again, there is another man, weighed now
By twice eight years beyond the seven-times-ten,
Appointed overweight to break our branch.
And this man's loaded branch lifts, more than snow,
All the world's cark and care, though a bird's-nest
Were a superfluous burden: notably
Hath he been pressed, as if his age were youth,
From to-day's dawn till now that day departs,
Trying one question with true sweat of soul,
"Shall the said doomed man fitlier die or live?"
When a straw swallowed in his posset, stool
Stumbled on where his path lies, any puff
That 's incident to such a smoking flax,
Hurries the natural end and quenches him!
Now calculate, thou sage, the chances here,
Say, which shall die the sooner, this or that?
"That, possibly, this in all likelihood."
I thought so: yet thou tripp'st, my foreign friend!
No, it will be quite otherwise, — to-day
Is Guido's last: my term is yet to run.

But say the Swede were right, and I forthwith
Acknowledge a prompt summons and lie dead:
Why, then I stand already in God's face
And hear, "Since by its fruit a tree is judged,
Show me thy fruit, the latest act of thine!
For in the last is summed the first and all, —
What thy life last put heart and soul into,

There shall I taste thy product." I must plead
This condemnation of a man to-day.

Not so! Expect nor question nor reply
At what we figure as God's judgment-bar!
None of this vile way by the barren words
Which, more than any deed, characterize
Man as made subject to a curse: no speech —
That still bursts o'er some lie which lurks inside,
As the split skin across the coppery snake,
And most denotes man! since, in all beside,
In hate or lust or guile or unbelief,
Out of some core of truth the excrescence comes,
And, in the last resort, the man may urge
"So was I made, a weak thing that gave way
To truth, to impulse only strong since true,
And hated, lusted, used guile, forewent faith."
But when man walks the garden of this world
For his own solace, and, unchecked by law,
Speaks or keeps silence as himself sees fit,
Without the least incumbency to lie,
— Why, can he tell you what a rose is like,
Or how the birds fly, and not slip to false
Though truth serve better? Man must tell his mate
Of you, me and himself, knowing he lies,
Knowing his fellow knows the same, — will think
"He lies, it is the method of a man!"
And yet will speak for answer "It is truth"
To him who shall rejoin "Again a lie!"
Therefore these filthy rags of speech, this coil
Of statement, comment, query and response,
Tatters all too contaminate for use,
Have no renewing: He, the Truth, is, too,
The Word. We men, in our degree, may know
There, simply, instantaneously, as here
After long time and amid many lies,
Whatever we dare think we know indeed
— That I am I, as He is He, — what else?
But be man's method for man's life at least!
Wherefore, Antonio Pignatelli, thou
My ancient self, who wast no Pope so long
But studiedst God and man, the many years
I' the school, i' the cloister, in the diocese
Domestic, legate-rule in foreign lands, —
Thou other force in those old busy days
Than this gray ultimate decrepitude, —

Yet sensible of fires that more and more
Visit a soul, in passage to the sky,
Left nakeder than when flesh-robe was new —
Thou, not Pope but the mere old man o' the world,
Supposed inquisitive and dispassionate,
Wilt thou, the one whose speech I somewhat trust,
Question the after-me, this self now Pope,
Hear his procedure, criticise his work?
Wise in its generation is the world.

This is why Guido is found reprobate.
I see him furnished forth for his career,
On starting for the life-chance in our world,
With nearly all we count sufficient help:
Body and mind in balance, a sound frame,
A solid intellect: the wit to seek,
Wisdom to choose, and courage wherewithal
To deal in whatsoever circumstance
Should minister to man, make life succeed.
Oh, and much drawback! what were earth without?
Is this our ultimate stage, or starting-place
To try man's foot, if it will creep or climb,
'Mid obstacles in seeming, points that prove
Advantage for who vaults from low to high
And makes the stumbling-block a stepping-stone?
So, Guido, born with appetite, lacks food:
Is poor, who yet could deftly play-off wealth:
Straitened, whose limbs are restless till at large.
He, as he eyes each outlet of the cirque
And narrow penfold for probation, pines
After the good things just outside its grate,
With less monition, fainter conscience-twitch,
Rarer instinctive qualm at the first feel
Of greed unseemly, prompting grasp undue,
Than nature furnishes her main mankind, —
Making it harder to do wrong than right
The first time, careful lest the common ear
Break measure, miss the outstep of life's march.
Wherein I see a trial fair and fit
For one else too unfairly fenced about,
Set above sin, beyond his fellows here:
Guarded from the arch-tempter all must fight,
By a great birth, traditionary name,
Diligent culture, choice companionship,
Above all, conversancy with the faith
Which puts forth for its base of doctrine just,

"Man is born nowise to content himself,
But please God." He accepted such a rule,
Recognized man's obedience; and the Church,
Which simply is such rule's embodiment,
He clave to, he held on by, — nay, indeed,
Near pushed inside of, deep as layman durst,
Professed so much of priesthood as might sue
For priest's-exemption where the layman sinned, —
Got his arm frocked which, bare, the law would bruise.
Hence, at this moment, what 's his last resource,
His extreme stay and utmost stretch of hope
But that, — convicted of such crime as law
Wipes not away save with a worldling's blood, —
Guido, the three-parts consecrate, may 'scape?
Nay, the portentous brothers of the man
Are veritably priests, protected each
May do his murder in the Church's pale,
Abate Paul, Canon Girolamo!
This is the man proves irreligiousest
Of all mankind, religion's parasite!
This may forsooth plead dinned ear, jaded sense,
The vice o' the watcher who bides near the bell,
Sleeps sound because the clock is vigilant,
And cares not whether it be shade or shine,
Doling out day and night to all men else!
Why was the choice o' the man to niche himself
Perversely 'neath the tower where Time's own tongue
Thus undertakes to sermonize the world?
Why, but because the solemn is safe too,
The belfry proves a fortress of a sort,
Has other uses than to teach the hour:
Turns sunscreen, paravent and ombrifuge
To whoso seeks a shelter in its pale,
— Ay, and attractive to unwary folk
Who gaze at storied portal, statued spire,
And go home with full head but empty purse,
Nor dare suspect the sacristan the thief!
Shall Judas — hard upon the donor's heel,
To filch the fragments of the basket — plead
He was too near the preacher's mouth, nor sat
Attent with fifties in a company?
No, — closer to promulgated decree,
Clearer the censure of default. Proceed!

I find him bound, then, to begin life well;
Fortified by propitious circumstance,

Great birth, good breeding, with the Church for guide,
How lives he? Cased thus in a coat of proof,
Mailed like a man-at-arms, though all the while
A puny starveling, — does the breast pant big,
The limb swell to the limit, emptiness
Strive to become solidity indeed?
Rather, he shrinks up like the ambiguous fish,
Detaches flesh from shell and outside show,
And steals by moonlight (I have seen the thing)
In and out, now to prey and now to skulk.
Armor he boasts when a wave breaks on beach,
Or bird stoops for the prize: with peril nigh, —
The man of rank, the much-befriended man,
The man almost affiliate to the Church,
Such is to deal with, let the world beware!
Does the world recognize, pass prudently?
Do tides abate and sea-fowl hunt i' the deep?
Already is the slug from out its mew,
Ignobly faring with all loose and free,
Sand-fly and slush-worm at their garbage-feast,
A naked blotch no better than they all:
Guido has dropped nobility, slipped the Church,
Plays trickster if not cut-purse, body and soul
Prostrate among the filthy feeders — faugh!
And when Law takes him by surprise at last,
Catches the foul thing on its carrion-prey,
Behold, he points to shell left high and dry,
Pleads "But the case out yonder is myself!"
Nay, it is thou, Law prongs amid thy peers,
Congenial vermin; that was none of thee,
Thine outside, — give it to the soldier-crab!

For I find this black mark impinge the man,
That he believes in just the vile of life.
Low instinct, base pretension, are these truth?
Then, that aforesaid armor, probity,
He figures in, is falsehood scale on scale;
Honor and faith, — a lie and a disguise,
Probably for all livers in this world,
Certainly for himself! All say good words
To who will hear, all do thereby bad deeds
To who must undergo; so thrive mankind!
See this habitual creed exemplified
Most in the last deliberate act; as last,
So, very sum and substance of the soul
Of him that planned and leaves one perfect piece,

The sin brought under jurisdiction now,
Even the marriage of the man: this act
I sever from his life as sample, show
For Guido's self, intend to test him by,
As, from a cup filled fairly at the fount,
By the components we decide enough
Or to let flow as late, or stanch the source.

He purposes this marriage, I remark,
On no one motive that should prompt thereto —
Farthest, by consequence, from ends alleged
Appropriate to the action; so they were:
The best, he knew and feigned, the worst he took.
Not one permissible impulse moves the man,
From the mere liking of the eye and ear,
To the true longing of the heart that loves,
No trace of these: but all to instigate,
Is what sinks man past level of the brute,
Whose appetite if brutish is a truth.
All is the lust for money: to get gold, —
Why, lie, rob, if it must be, murder! Make
Body and soul wring gold out, lured within
The clutch of hate by love, the trap's pretence!
What good else get from bodies and from souls?
This got, there were some life to lead thereby,
— What, where or how, appreciate those who tell
How the toad lives: it lives, — enough for me!
To get this good — with but a groan or so,
Then, silence of the victims — were the feat.
He foresaw, made a picture in his mind, —
Of father and mother stunned and echoless
To the blow, as they lie staring at fate's jaws
Their folly danced into, till the woe fell;
Edged in a month by strenuous cruelty
From even the poor nook whence they watched the wolf
Feast on their heart, the lamb-like child his prey;
Plundered to the last remnant of their wealth,
(What daily pittance pleased the plunderer dole,)
Hunted forth to go hide head, starve and die,
And leave the pale awe-stricken wife, past hope
Of help i' the world now, mute and motionless,
His slave, his chattel, to first use, then destroy.
All this, he bent mind how to bring about,
Put plain in act and life, as painted plain,
So have success, reach crown of earthly good,
In this particular enterprise of man,

By marriage — undertaken in God's face
With all these lies so opposite God's truth,
For end so other than man's end.

Thus schemes
Guido, and thus would carry out his scheme:
But when an obstacle first blocks the path,
When he finds none may boast monopoly
Of lies and trick i' the tricking lying world, —
That sorry timid natures, even this sort
O' the Comparini, want nor trick nor lie
Proper to the kind, — that as the gor-crow treats
The bramble-finch so treats the finch the moth,
And the great Guido is minutely matched
By this same couple, — whether true or false
The revelation of Pompilia's birth,
Which in a moment brings his scheme to nought, —
Then, he is piqued, advances yet a stage,
Leaves the low region to the finch and fly,
Soars to the zenith whence the fiercer fowl
May dare the inimitable swoop. I see.
He draws now on the curious crime, the fine
Felicity and flower of wickedness;
Determines, by the utmost exercise
Of violence, made safe and sure by craft,
To satiate malice, pluck one last arch-pang
From the parents, else would triumph out of reach,
By punishing their child, within reach yet,
Who, by thought, word or deed, could nowise wrong
I' the matter that now moves him. So plans he,
Always subordinating (note the point!)
Revenge, the manlier sin, to interest
The meaner, — would pluck pang forth, but unclench
No gripe in the act, let fall no money-piece.
Hence a plan for so plaguing, body and soul,
His wife, so putting, day by day, hour by hour,
The untried torture to the untouched place,
As must precipitate an end foreseen,
Goad her into some plain revolt, most like
Plunge upon patent suicidal shame,
Death to herself, damnation by rebound
To those whose hearts he, holding hers, holds still:
Such plan as, in its bad completeness, shall
Ruin the three together and alike,
Yet leave himself in luck and liberty,
No claim renounced, no right a forfeiture,

His person unendangered, his good fame
Without a flaw, his pristine worth intact, —
While they, with all their claims and rights that cling,
Shall forthwith crumble off him every side,
Scorched into dust, a plaything for the winds.
As when, in our Campagna, there is fired
The nest-like work that overruns a hut;
And, as the thatch burns here, there, everywhere,
Even to the ivy and wild vine, that bound
And blessed the home where men were happy once,
There rises gradual, black amid the blaze,
Some grim and unscathed nucleus of the nest, —
Some old malicious tower, some obscene tomb
They thought a temple in their ignorance,
And clung about and thought to lean upon —
There laughs it o'er their ravage, — where are they?
So did his cruelty burn life about,
And lay the ruin bare in dreadfulness,
Try the persistency of torment so
Upon the wife, that, at extremity,
Some crisis brought about by fire and flame,
The patient frenzy-stung must needs break loose,
Fly anyhow, find refuge anywhere,
Even in the arms of who should front her first,
No monster but a man — while nature shrieked
"Or thus escape, or die!" The spasm arrived,
Not the escape by way of sin, — O God,
Who shall pluck sheep Thou holdest, from Thy hand?
Therefore she lay resigned to die, — so far
The simple cruelty was foiled. Why then,
Craft to the rescue, let craft supplement
Cruelty and show hell a masterpiece!
Hence this consummate lie, this love-intrigue,
Unmanly simulation of a sin,
With place and time and circumstance to suit —
These letters false beyond all forgery —
Not just handwriting and mere authorship,
But false to body and soul they figure forth —
As though the man had cut out shape and shape
From fancies of that other Aretine,
To paste below — incorporate the filth
With cherub faces on a missal-page!

Whereby the man so far attains his end
That strange temptation is permitted, — see!
Pompilia, wife, and Caponsacchi, priest,

Are brought together as nor priest nor wife
Should stand, and there is passion in the place,
Power in the air for evil as for good,
Promptings from heaven and hell, as if the stars
Fought in their courses for a fate to be.
Thus stand the wife and priest, a spectacle,
I doubt not, to unseen assemblage there.
No lamp will mark that window for a shrine,
No tablet signalize the terrace, teach
New generations which succeed the old,
The pavement of the street is holy ground;
No bard describe in verse how Christ prevailed
And Satan fell like lightning! Why repine?
What does the world, told truth, but lie the more?

A second time the plot is foiled; nor, now,
By corresponding sin for countercheck,
No wile and trick that baffle trick and wile, —
The play o' the parents! Here the blot is blanched
By God's gift of a purity of soul
That will not take pollution, ermine-like
Armed from dishonor by its own soft snow.
Such was this gift of God who showed for once
How He would have the world go white: it seems
As a new attribute were born of each
Champion of truth, the priest and wife I praise, —
As a new safeguard sprang up in defence
Of their new noble nature: so a thorn
Comes to the aid of and completes the rose —
Courage, to wit, no woman's gift nor priest's,
I' the crisis; might leaps vindicating right.
See how the strong aggressor, bad and bold,
With every vantage, preconcerts surprise,
Leaps of a sudden at his victim's throat
In a byway, — how fares he when face to face
With Caponsacchi? Who fights, who fears now?
There quails Count Guido, armed to the chattering teeth,
Cowers at the steadfast eye and quiet word
O' the Canon of the Pieve! There skulks crime
Behind law called in to back cowardice!
While out of the poor trampled worm the wife,
Springs up a serpent!

But anon of these!
Him I judge now, — of him proceed to note,
Failing the first, a second chance befriends

Guido, gives pause ere punishment arrive.
The law he called, comes, hears, adjudicates,
Nor does amiss i' the main, — secludes the wife
From the husband, respites the oppressed one, grants
Probation to the oppressor, could he know
The mercy of a minute's fiery purge!
The furnace-coals alike of public scorn,
Private remorse, heaped glowing on his head,
What if — the force and guile, the ore's alloy,
Eliminate, his baser soul refined —
The lost be saved even yet, so as by fire?
Let him, rebuked, go softly all his days
And, when no graver musings claim their due,
Meditate on a man's immense mistake
Who, fashioned to use feet and walk, deigns crawl —
Takes the unmanly means — ay, though to ends
Man scarce should make for, would but reach through wrong, —
May sin, but nowise needs shame manhood so:
Since fowlers hawk, shoot, nay and snare the game,
And yet eschew vile practice, nor find sport
In torch-light treachery or the luring owl.

But how hunts Guido? Why, the fraudful trap —
Late spurned to ruin by the indignant feet
Of fellows in the chase who loved fair play —
Here he picks up its fragments to the least,
Lades him and hies to the old lurking-place
Where haply he may patch again, refit
The mischief, file its blunted teeth anew,
Make sure, next time, first snap shall break the bone.
Craft, greed and violence complot revenge:
Craft, for its quota, schemes to bring about
And seize occasion and be safe withal:
Greed craves its act may work both far and near,
Crush the tree, branch and trunk and root beside,
Whichever twig or leaf arrests a streak
Of possible sunshine else would coin itself,
And drop down one more gold piece in the path:
Violence stipulates, "Advantage proved,
And safety sure, be pain the overplus!
Murder with jagged knife! Cut but tear too!
Foiled oft, starved long, glut malice for amends!"
And what, craft's scheme? scheme sorrowful and strange
As though the elements, whom mercy checked,
Had mustered hate for one eruption more,

One final deluge to surprise the Ark
Cradled and sleeping on its mountain-top:
Their outbreak-signal — what but the dove's coo,
Back with the olive in her bill for news
Sorrow was over? 'T is an infant's birth,
Guido's first-born, his son and heir, that gives
The occasion: other men cut free their souls
From care in such a case, fly up in thanks
To God, reach, recognize His love for once:
Guido cries, "Soul, at last the mire is thine!
Lie there in likeness of a money-bag,
My babe's birth so pins down past moving now,
That I dare cut adrift the lives I late
Scrupled to touch lest thou escape with them!
These parents and their child my wife, — touch one,
Lose all! Their rights determined on a head
I could but hate, not harm, since from each hair
Dangled a hope for me: now — chance and change!
No right was in their child but passes plain
To that child's child and through such child to me.
I am a father now, — come what, come will,
I represent my child; he comes between —
Cuts sudden off the sunshine of this life
From those three: why, the gold is in his curls!
Not with old Pietro's, Violante's head,
Not his gray horror, her more hideous black —
Go these, devoted to the knife!"
'T is done:
Wherefore should mind misgive, heart hesitate?
He calls to counsel, fashions certain four
Colorless natures counted clean till now,
— Rustic simplicity, uncorrupted youth,
Ignorant virtue! Here 's the gold o' the prime
When Saturn ruled, shall shock our leaden day —
The clown abash the courtier! Mark it, bards!
The courtier tries his hand on clownship here,
Speaks a word, names a crime, appoints a price, —
Just breathes on what, suffused with all himself,
Is red-hot henceforth past distinction now
I' the common glow of hell. And thus they break
And blaze on us at Rome, Christ's birthnight-eve!
Oh angels that sang erst "On the earth, peace!
To man, good will!" — such peace finds earth to-day!
After the seventeen hundred years, so man
Wills good to man, so Guido makes complete
His murder! what is it I said? — cuts loose

Three lives that hitherto he suffered cling,
Simply because each served to nail secure,
By a corner of the money-bag, his soul,—
Therefore, lives sacred till the babe's first breath
O'erweights them in the balance,—off they fly!

So is the murder managed, sin conceived
To the full: and why not crowned with triumph too?
Why must the sin, conceived thus, bring forth death?
I note how, within hair's-breadth of escape,
Impunity and the thing supposed success,
Guido is found when the check comes, the change,
The monitory touch o' the tether—felt
By few, not marked by many, named by none
At the moment, only recognized aright
I' the fulness of the days, for God's, lest sin
Exceed the service, leap the line: such check—
A secret which this life finds hard to keep,
And, often guessed, is never quite revealed—
Needs must trip Guido on a stumbling-block
Too vulgar, too absurdly plain i' the path!
Study this single oversight of care,
This hebetude that marred sagacity,
Forgetfulness of all the man best knew,—
How any stranger having need to fly,
Needs but to ask and have the means of flight.
Why, the first urchin tells you, to leave Rome,
Get horses, you must show the warrant, just
The banal scrap, clerk's scribble, a fair word buys,
Or foul one, if a ducat sweeten word,—
And straight authority will back demand,
Give you the pick o' the post-house!—how should he,
Then, resident at Rome for thirty years,
Guido, instruct a stranger! And himself
Forgets just this poor paper scrap, wherewith
Armed, every door he knocks at opens wide
To save him: horsed and manned, with such advance
O' the hunt behind, why, 't were the easy task
Of hours told on the fingers of one hand,
To reach the Tuscan frontier, laugh at home,
Light-hearted with his fellows of the place,—
Prepared by that strange shameful judgment, that
Satire upon a sentence just pronounced
By the Rota and confirmed by the Granduke,—
Ready in a circle to receive their peer,
Appreciate his good story how, when Rome,
The Pope-King and the populace of priests

Made common cause with their confederate
The other priestling who seduced his wife,
He, all unaided, wiped out the affront
With decent bloodshed and could face his friends,
Frolic it in the world's eye. Ay, such tale
Missed such applause. and by such oversight!
So, tired and footsore, those blood-flustered five
Went reeling on the road through dark and cold,
The few permissible miles, to sink at length,
Wallow and sleep in the first wayside straw,
As the other herd quenched, i' the wash o' the wave,
— Each swine, the devil inside him: so slept they,
And so were caught and caged — all through one trip,
One touch of fool in Guido the astute!
He curses the omission, I surmise,
More than the murder. Why, thou fool and blind,
It is the mercy-stroke that stops thy fate,
Hamstrings and holds thee to thy hurt, — but how?
On the edge o' the precipice! One minute more,
Thou hadst gone farther and fared worse, my son,
Fathoms down on the flint and fire beneath!
Thy comrades each and all were of one mind,
Thy murder done, to straightway murder thee
In turn, because of promised pay withheld.
So, to the last, greed found itself at odds
With craft in thee, and, proving conqueror,
Had sent thee, the same night that crowned thy hope,
Thither where, this same day, I see thee not,
Nor, through God's mercy, need, to-morrow, see.

Such I find Guido, midmost blotch of black
Discernible in this group of clustered crimes
Huddling together in the cave they call
Their palace, outraged day thus penetrates.
Around him ranged, now close and now remote,
Prominent or obscure to meet the needs
O' the mage and master, I detect each shape
Subsidiary i' the scene nor loathed the less,
All alike colored, all descried akin
By one and the same pitchy furnace stirred
At the centre: see, they lick the master's hand, —
This fox-faced horrible priest, this brother-brute
The Abate, — why, mere wolfishness looks well,
Guido stands honest in the red o' the flame,
Beside this yellow that would pass for white,
Twice Guido, all craft but no violence,

This copier of the mien and gait and garb
Of Peter and Paul, that he may go disguised,
Rob halt and lame, sick folk i' the temple-porch!
Armed with religion, fortified by law,
A man of peace, who trims the midnight lamp
And turns the classic page — and all for craft,
All to work harm with, yet incur no scratch!
While Guido brings the struggle to a close,
Paul steps back the due distance, clear o' the trap
He builds and baits. Guido I catch and judge;
Paul is past reach in this world and my time:
That is a case reserved. Pass to the next,
The boy of the brood, the young Girolamo,
Priest, Canon, and what more? nor wolf nor fox,
But hybrid, neither craft nor violence
Wholly, part violence part craft: such cross
Tempts speculation — will both blend one day,
And prove hell's better product? Or subside
And let the simple quality emerge,
Go on with Satan's service the old way?
Meanwhile, what promise, — what performance too!
For there 's a new distinctive touch, I see,
Lust — lacking in the two — hell's own blue tint
That gives a character and marks the man
More than a match for yellow and red. Once more,
A case reserved: why should I doubt? Then comes
The gaunt gray nightmare in the furthest smoke,
The hag that gave these three abortions birth,
Unmotherly mother and unwomanly
Woman, that near turns motherhood to shame,
Womanliness to loathing: no one word,
No gesture to curb cruelty a whit
More than the she-pard thwarts her playsome whelps
Trying their milk-teeth on the soft o' the throat
O' the first fawn, flung, with those beseeching eyes,
Flat in the covert! How should she but couch,
Lick the dry lips, unsheathe the blunted claw,
Catch 'twixt her placid eyewinks at what chance
Old bloody half-forgotten dream may flit,
Born when herself was novice to the taste,
The while she lets youth take its pleasure. Last,
These God-abandoned wretched lumps of life,
These four companions, — country-folk this time,
Not tainted by the unwholesome civic breath,
Much less the curse o' the court! Mere striplings too,
Fit to do human nature justice still!

Surely when impudence in Guido's shape
Shall propose crime and proffer money's-worth
To these stout tall rough bright-eyed black-haired boys,
The blood shall bound in answer to each cheek
Before the indignant outcry break from lip!
Are these i' the mood to murder, hardly loosed
From healthy autumn-finish of ploughed glebe,
Grapes in the barrel, work at happy end,
And winter near with rest and Christmas play?
How greet they Guido with his final task —
(As if he but proposed "One vineyard more
To dig, ere frost come, then relax indeed!")
"Anywhere, anyhow and anywhy,
Murder me some three people, old and young,
Ye never heard the names of, — and be paid
So much!" And the whole four accede at once.
Demur? Do cattle bidden march or halt?
Is it some lingering habit, old fond faith
I' the lord o' the land, instructs them, — birthright badge
Of feudal tenure claims its slaves again?
Not so at all, thou noble human heart!
All is done purely for the pay, — which, earned,
And not forthcoming at the instant, makes
Religion heresy, and the lord o' the land
Fit subject for a murder in his turn.
The patron with cut throat and rifled purse,
Deposited i' the roadside-ditch, his due,
Nought hinders each good fellow trudging home,
The heavier by a piece or two in poke,
And so with new zest to the common life,
Mattock and spade, plough-tail and wagon-shaft,
Till some such other piece of luck betide,
Who knows? Since this is a mere start in life,
And none of them exceeds the twentieth year.
Nay, more i' the background yet? Unnoticed forms
Claim to be classed, subordinately vile?
Complacent lookers-on that laugh, — perchance
Shake head as their friend's horse-play grows too rough
With the mere child he manages amiss —
But would not interfere and make bad worse
For twice the fractious tears and prayers: thou know'st
Civility better, Marzi-Medici,
Governor for thy kinsman the Granduke!
Fit representative of law, man's lamp
I' the magistrate's grasp full-flare, no rushlight-end
Sputtering 'twixt thumb and finger of the priest!

Whose answer to the couple's cry for help
Is a threat, — whose remedy of Pompilia's wrong,
A shrug o' the shoulder, and facetious word
Or wink, traditional with Tuscan wits,
To Guido in the doorway. Laud to law!
The wife is pushed back to the husband, he
Who knows how these home-squabblings persecute
People who have the public good to mind,
And work best with a silence in the court!

Ah, but I save my word at least for thee,
Archbishop, who art under, i' the Church,
As I am under God, — thou, chosen by both
To do the shepherd's office, feed the sheep —
How of this lamb that panted at thy foot
While the wolf pressed on her within crook's reach?
Wast thou the hireling that did turn and flee?
With thee at least anon the little word!

Such denizens o' the cave now cluster round
And heat the furnace sevenfold: time indeed
A bolt from heaven should cleave roof and clear place,
Transfix and show the world, suspiring flame,
The main offender, scar and brand the rest
Hurrying, each miscreant to his hole: then flood
And purify the scene with outside day —
Which yet, in the absolutest drench of dark,
Ne'er wants a witness, some stray beauty-beam
To the despair of hell.

First of the first,
Such I pronounce Pompilia, then as now
Perfect in whiteness: stoop thou down, my child,
Give one good moment to the poor old Pope
Heart-sick at having all his world to blame —
Let me look at thee in the flesh as erst,
Let me enjoy the old clean linen garb,
Not the new splendid vesture! Armed and crowned,
Would Michael, yonder, be, nor crowned nor armed,
The less pre-eminent angel? Everywhere
I see in the world the intellect of man,
That sword, the energy his subtle spear,
The knowledge which defends him like a shield —
Everywhere; but they make not up, I think,
The marvel of a soul like thine, earth's flower
She holds up to the softened gaze of God!

It was not given Pompilia to know much,
Speak much, to write a book, to move mankind,
Be memorized by who records my time.
Yet if in purity and patience, if
In faith held fast despite the plucking fiend,
Safe like the signet stone with the new name
That saints are known by, — if in right returned
For wrong, most pardon for worst injury,
If there be any virtue, any praise, —
Then will this woman-child have proved — who knows? —
Just the one prize vouchsafed unworthy me,
Seven years a gardener of the untoward ground
I till, — this earth, my sweat and blood manure
All the long day that barrenly grows dusk:
At least one blossom makes me proud at eve
Born 'mid the briers of my enclosure! Still
(Oh, here as elsewhere, nothingness of man!)
Those be the plants, imbedded yonder South
To mellow in the morning, those made fat
By the master's eye, that yield such timid leaf,
Uncertain bud, as product of his pains!
While — see how this mere chance-sown, cleft-nursed seed,
That sprang up by the wayside 'neath the foot
Of the enemy, this breaks all into blaze,
Spreads itself, one wide glory of desire
To incorporate the whole great sun it loves
From the inch-height whence it looks and longs! My flower,
My rose, I gather for the breast of God,
This I praise most in thee, where all I praise,
That having been obedient to the end
According to the light allotted, law
Prescribed thy life, still tried, still standing test, —
Dutiful to the foolish parents first,
Submissive next to the bad husband, — nay,
Tolerant of those meaner miserable
That did his hests, eked out the dole of pain, —
Thou, patient thus, couldst rise from law to law,
The old to the new, promoted at one cry
O' the trump of God to the new service, not
To longer bear, but henceforth fight, be found
Sublime in new impatience with the foe!
Endure man and obey God: plant firm foot
On neck of man, tread man into the hell
Meet for him, and obey God all the more!
Oh child that didst despise thy life so much
When it seemed only thine to keep or lose,

How the fine ear felt fall the first low word
"Value life, and preserve life for My sake!"
Thou didst . . . how shall I say? . . . receive so long
The standing ordinance of God on earth,
What wonder if the novel claim had clashed
With old requirement, seemed to supersede
Too much the customary law? But, brave,
Thou at first prompting of what I call God,
And fools call Nature, didst hear, comprehend,
Accept the obligation laid on thee,
Mother elect, to save the unborn child,
As brute and bird do, reptile and the fly,
Ay and, I nothing doubt, even tree, shrub, plant
And flower o' the field, all in a common pact
To worthily defend the trust of trusts,
Life from the Ever Living: — didst resist —
Anticipate the office that is mine —
And with his own sword stay the upraised arm,
The endeavor of the wicked, and defend
Him who — again in my default — was there
For visible providence: one less true than thou
To touch, i' the past, less practised in the right,
Approved less far in all docility
To all instruction, — how had such an one
Made scruple "Is this motion a decree?"
It was authentic to the experienced ear
O' the good and faithful servant. Go past me
And get thy praise, — and be not far to seek
Presently when I follow if I may!

And surely not so very much apart
Need I place thee, my warrior-priest, — in whom
What if I gain the other rose, the gold,
We grave to imitate God's miracle,
Greet monarchs with, good rose in its degree?
Irregular noble scapegrace — son the same!
Faulty — and peradventure ours the fault
Who still misteach, mislead, throw hook and line,
Thinking to land leviathan forsooth,
Tame the scaled neck, play with him as a bird,
And bind him for our maidens! Better bear
The King of Pride go wantoning awhile,
Unplagued by cord in nose and thorn in jaw,
Through deep to deep, followed by all that shine,
Churning the blackness hoary: He who made
The comely terror, He shall make the sword

To match that piece of netherstone his heart,
Ay, nor miss praise thereby; who else shut fire
I' the stone, to leap from mouth at sword's first stroke,
In lamps of love and faith, the chivalry
That dares the right and disregards alike
The yea and nay o' the world? Self-sacrifice,—
What if an idol took it? Ask the Church
Why she was wont to turn each Venus here,—
Poor Rome perversely lingered round, despite
Instruction, for the sake of purblind love,—
Into Madonna's shape, and waste no whit
Of aught so rare on earth as gratitude!
All this sweet savor was not ours but thine,
Nard of the rock, a natural wealth we name
Incense, and treasure up as food for saints,
When flung to us — whose function was to give
Not find the costly perfume. Do I smile?
Nay, Caponsacchi, much I find amiss,
Blameworthy, punishable in this freak
Of thine, this youth prolonged, though age was ripe,
This masquerade in sober day, with change
Of motley too, — now hypocrite's disguise,
Now fool's-costume: which lie was least like truth,
Which the ungainlier, more discordant garb,
With that symmetric soul inside my son,
The churchman's or the worldling's, — let him judge,
Our adversary who enjoys the task!
I rather chronicle the healthy rage,—
When the first moan broke from the martyr-maid
At that uncaging of the beasts, — made bare
My athlete on the instant, gave such good
Great undisguised leap over post and pale
Right into the mid-cirque, free fighting-place.
There may have been rash stripping — every rag
Went to the winds, — infringement manifold
Of laws prescribed pudicity, I fear,
In this impulsive and prompt self-display!
Ever such tax comes of the foolish youth;
Men mulct the wiser manhood, and suspect
No veritable star swims out of cloud.
Bear thou such imputation, undergo
The penalty I nowise dare relax,—
Conventional chastisement and rebuke.
But for the outcome, the brave starry birth
Conciliating earth with all that cloud,
Thank heaven as I do! Ay, such championship

Of God at first blush, such prompt cheery thud
Of glove on ground that answers ringingly
The challenge of the false knight, — watch we long,
And wait we vainly for its gallant like
From those appointed to the service, sworn
His body-guard with pay and privilege —
White-cinct, because in white walks sanctity,
Red-socked, how else proclaim fine scorn of flesh,
Unchariness of blood when blood faith begs!
Where are the men-at-arms with cross on coat?
Aloof, bewraying their attire: whilst thou
In mask and motley, pledged to dance not fight,
Sprang'st forth the hero! In thought, word and deed,
How throughout all thy warfare thou wast pure,
I find it easy to believe: and if
At any fateful moment of the strange
Adventure, the strong passion of that strait,
Fear and surprise, may have revealed too much, —
As when a thundrous midnight, with black air
That burns, raindrops that blister, breaks a spell,
Draws out the excessive virtue of some sheathed
Shut unsuspected flower that hoards and hides
Immensity of sweetness, — so, perchance,
Might the surprise and fear release too much
The perfect beauty of the body and soul
Thou savedst in thy passion for God's sake,
He who is Pity. Was the trial sore?
Temptation sharp? Thank God a second time!
Why comes temptation but for man to meet
And master and make crouch beneath his foot,
And so be pedestalled in triumph? Pray
"Lead us into no such temptations, Lord!"
Yea, but, O Thou whose servants are the bold,
Lead such temptations by the head and hair,
Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight,
That so he may do battle and have praise!
Do I not see the praise? — that while thy mates
Bound to deserve i' the matter, prove at need
Unprofitable through the very pains
We gave to train them well and start them fair, —
Are found too stiff, with standing ranked and ranged,
For onset in good earnest, too obtuse
Of ear, through iteration of command,
For catching quick the sense of the real cry, —
Thou, whose sword-hand was used to strike the lute,
Whose sentry-station graced some wanton's gate,

Thou didst push forward and show mettle, shame
The laggards, and retrieve the day. Well done!
Be glad thou hast let light into the world,
Through that irregular breach o' the boundary, — see
The same upon thy path and march assured,
Learning anew the use of soldiership,
Self-abnegation, freedom from all fear,
Loyalty to the life's end! Ruminate,
Deserve the initiatory spasm, — once more
Work, be unhappy but bear life, my son!

And troop you, somewhere 'twixt the best and worst,
Where crowd the indifferent product, all too poor
Makeshift, starved samples of humanity!
Father and mother, huddle there and hide!
A gracious eye may find you! Foul and fair,
Sadly mixed natures: self-indulgent, — yet
Self-sacrificing too: how the love soars,
How the craft, avarice, vanity and spite
Sink again! So they keep the middle course,
Slide into silly crime at unaware,
Slip back upon the stupid virtue, stay
Nowhere enough for being classed, I hope
And fear. Accept the swift and rueful death,
Taught, somewhat sternlier than is wont, what waits
The ambiguous creature, — how the one black tuft
Steadies the aim of the arrow just as well
As the wide faultless white on the bird's breast!
Nay, you were punished in the very part
That looked most pure of speck, — 't was honest love
Betrayed you, — did love seem most worthy pains,
Challenge such purging, since ordained survive
When all the rest of you was done with? Go!
Never again elude the choice of tints!
White shall not neutralize the black, nor good
Compensate bad in man, absolve him so:
Life's business being just the terrible choice.

So do I see, pronounce on all and some
Grouped for my judgment now, — profess no doubt
While I pronounce: dark, difficult enough
The human sphere, yet eyes grow sharp by use,
I find the truth, dispart the shine from shade,
As a mere man may, with no special touch
O' the lynx-gift in each ordinary orb:
Nay, if the popular notion class me right,

One of wellnigh decayed intelligence, —
What of that? Through hard labor and good will,
And habitude that gives a blind man sight
At the practised finger-ends of him, I do
Discern, and dare decree in consequence,
Whatever prove the peril of mistake.
Whence, then, this quite new quick cold thrill, — cloud-like,
This keen dread creeping from a quarter scarce
Suspected in the skies I nightly scan?
What slacks the tense nerve, saps the wound-up spring
Of the act that should and shall be, sends the mount
And mass o' the whole man's-strength, — conglobed so late —
Shudderingly into dust, a moment's work?
While I stand firm, go fearless, in this world,
For this life recognize and arbitrate,
Touch and let stay, or else remove a thing,
Judge "This is right, this object out of place,"
Candle in hand that helps me and to spare, —
What if a voice deride me, "Perk and pry!
Brighten each nook with thine intelligence!
Play the good householder, ply man and maid
With tasks prolonged into the midnight, test
Their work and nowise stint of the due wage
Each worthy worker: but with gyves and whip
Pay thou misprision of a single point
Plain to thy happy self who lift'st the light,
Lament'st the darkling, — bold to all beneath!
What if thyself adventure, now the place
Is purged so well? Leave pavement and mount roof,
Look round thee for the light of the upper sky,
The fire which lit thy fire which finds default
In Guido Franceschini to his cost!
What if, above in the domain of light,
Thou miss the accustomed signs, remark eclipse?
Shalt thou still gaze on ground nor lift a lid, —
Steady in thy superb prerogative,
Thy inch of inkling, — nor once face the doubt
I' the sphere above thee, darkness to be felt?"

Yet my poor spark had for its source, the sun;
Thither I sent the great looks which compel
Light from its fount: all that I do and am
Comes from the truth, or seen or else surmised,
Remembered or divined, as mere man may:
I know just so, nor otherwise. As I know,
I speak, — what should I know, then, and how speak

Were there a wild mistake of eye or brain
As to recorded governance above?
If my own breath, only, blew coal alight
I styled celestial and the morning-star?
I, who in this world act resolvedly,
Dispose of men, their bodies and their souls,
As they acknowledge or gainsay the light
I show them, — shall I too lack courage? — leave
I, too, the post of me, like those I blame?
Refuse, with kindred inconsistency,
To grapple danger whereby souls grow strong?
I am near the end; but still not at the end;
All to the very end is trial in life:
At this stage is the trial of my soul
Danger to face, or danger to refuse?
Shall I dare try the doubt now, or not dare?

O Thou, — as represented here to me
In such conception as my soul allows, —
Under Thy measureless, my atom width! —
Man's mind, what is it but a convex glass
Wherein are gathered all the scattered points
Picked out of the immensity of sky,
To reunite there, be our heaven for earth,
Our known unknown, our God revealed to man?
Existent somewhere, somehow, as a whole;
Here, as a whole proportioned to our sense,—
There, (which is nowhere, speech must babble thus!)
In the absolute immensity, the whole
Appreciable solely by Thyself, —
Here, by the little mind of man, reduced
To littleness that suits his faculty,
In the degree appreciable too;
Between Thee and ourselves — nay even, again,
Below us, to the extreme of the minute,
Appreciable by how many and what diverse
Modes of the life Thou madest be! (why live
Except for love, — how love unless they know?)
Each of them, only filling to the edge,
Insect or angel, his just length and breadth,
Due facet of reflection, — full, no less,
Angel or insect, as Thou framedst things.
I it is who have been appointed here
To represent Thee, in my turn, on earth,
Just as, if new philosophy know aught,
This one earth, out of all the multitude

Of peopled worlds, as stars are now supposed, —
Was chosen, and no sun-star of the swarm,
For stage and scene of Thy transcendent act
Beside which even the creation fades
Into a puny exercise of power.
Choice of the world, choice of the thing I am,
Both emanate alike from Thy dread play
Of operation outside this our sphere
Where things are classed and counted small or great, —
Incomprehensibly the choice is Thine!
I therefore bow my head and take Thy place.
There is, beside the works, a tale of Thee
In the world's mouth, which I find credible:
I love it with my heart: unsatisfied,
I try it with my reason, nor discept
From any point I probe and pronounce sound.
Mind is not matter nor from matter, but
Above, — leave matter then, proceed with mind!
Man's be the mind recognized at the height, —
Leave the inferior minds and look at man!
Is he the strong, intelligent and good
Up to his own conceivable height? Nowise.
Enough o' the low, — soar the conceivable height,
Find cause to match the effect in evidence,
The work i' the world, not man's but God's; leave man!
Conjecture of the worker by the work:
Is there strength there? — enough: intelligence?
Ample: but goodness in a like degree?
Not to the human eye in the present state,
An isoscele deficient in the base.
What lacks, then, of perfection fit for God
But just the instance which this tale supplies
Of love without a limit? So is strength,
So is intelligence; let love be so,
Unlimited in its self-sacrifice,
Then is the tale true and God shows complete.
Beyond the tale, I reach into the dark,
Feel what I cannot see, and still faith stands:
I can believe this dread machinery
Of sin and sorrow, would confound me else,
Devised — all pain, at most expenditure
Of pain by Who devised pain — to evolve,
By new machinery in counterpart,
The moral qualities of man — how else? —
To make him love in turn and be beloved,
Creative and self-sacrificing too,

And thus eventually God-like, (ay,
"I have said ye are Gods," — shall it be said for nought?)
Enable man to wring, from out all pain,
All pleasure for a common heritage
To all eternity: this may be surmised,
The other is revealed, — whether a fact,
Absolute, abstract, independent truth,
Historic, not reduced to suit man's mind, —
Or only truth reverberate, changed, made pass
A spectrum into mind, the narrow eye, —
The same and not the same, else unconceived —
Though quite conceivable to the next grade
Above it in intelligence, — as truth
Easy to man were blindness to the beast
By parity of procedure, — the same truth
In a new form, but changed in either case:
What matter so intelligence be filled?
To a child, the sea is angry, for it roars:
Frost bites, else why the tooth-like fret on face?
Man makes acoustics deal with the sea's wrath,
Explains the choppy cheek by chymic law, —
To man and child remains the same effect
On drum of ear and root of nose, change cause
Never so thoroughly: so my heart be struck,
What care I, — by God's gloved hand or the bare?
Nor do I much perplex me with aught hard,
Dubious in the transmitting of the tale, —
No, nor with certain riddles set to solve.
This life is training and a passage; pass, —
Still, we march over some flat obstacle
We made give way before us; solid truth
In front of it, what motion for the world?
The moral sense grows but by exercise.
'T is even as man grew probatively
Initiated in Godship, set to make
A fairer moral world than this he finds,
Guess now what shall be known hereafter. Deal
Thus with the present problem: as we see,
A faultless creature is destroyed, and sin
Has had its way i' the world where God should rule.
Ay, but for this irrelevant circumstance
Of inquisition after blood, we see
Pompilia lost and Guido saved: how long?
For his whole life: how much is that whole life?
We are not babes, but know the minute's worth,
And feel that life is large and the world small,
So, wait till life have passed from out the world.

Neither does this astonish at the end,
That whereas I can so receive and trust,
Other men, made with hearts and souls the same,
Reject and disbelieve, — subordinate
The future to the present, — sin, nor fear.
This I refer still to the foremost fact,
Life is probation and the earth no goal
But starting-point of man: compel him strive,
Which means, in man, as good as reach the goal, —
Why institute that race, his life, at all?
But this does overwhelm me with surprise,
Touch me to terror, — not that faith, the pearl,
Should be let lie by fishers wanting food, —
Nor, seen and handled by a certain few
Critical and contemptuous, straight consigned
To shore and shingle for the pebble it proves, —
But that, when haply found and known and named
By the residue made rich forevermore,
These, — that these favored ones, should in a trice
Turn, and with double zest go dredge for whelks,
Mud-worms that make the savory soup! Enough
O' the disbelievers, see the faithful few!
How do the Christians here deport them, keep
Their robes of white unspotted by the world?
What is this Aretine Archbishop, this
Man under me as I am under God,
This champion of the faith, I armed and decked,
Pushed forward, put upon a pinnacle,
To show the enemy his victor, — see!
What 's the best fighting when the couple close?
Pompilia cries, "Protect me from the wolf!"
He — "No, thy Guido is rough, heady, strong,
Dangerous to disquiet: let him bide!
He needs some bone to mumble, help amuse
The darkness of his den with: so, the fawn
Which limps up bleeding to my foot and lies,
— Come to me, daughter! — thus I throw him back!"
Have we misjudged here, over-armed our knight,
Given gold and silk where plain hard steel serves best,
Enfeebled whom we sought to fortify,
Made an archbishop and undone a saint?
Well, then, descend these heights, this pride of life,
Sit in the ashes with a barefoot monk
Who long ago stamped out the worldly sparks,
By fasting, watching, stone cell and wire scourge,
— No such indulgence as unknits the strength —

These breed the tight nerve and tough cuticle,
And the world's praise or blame runs rillet-wise
Off the broad back and brawny breast, we know!
He meets the first cold sprinkle of the world,
And shudders to the marrow. "Save this child?
Oh, my superiors, oh, the Archbishop's self!
Who was it dared lay hand upon the ark
His betters saw fall nor put finger forth?
Great ones could help yet help not: why should small?
I break my promise: let her break her heart!"
These are the Christians not the worldlings, not
The sceptics, who thus battle for the faith!
If foolish virgins disobey and sleep,
What wonder? But, this time, the wise that watch,
Sell lamps and buy lutes, exchange oil for wine,
The mystic Spouse betrays the Bridegroom here.
To our last resource, then! Since all flesh is weak,
Bind weaknesses together, we get strength:
The individual weighed, found wanting, try
Some institution, honest artifice
Whereby the units grow compact and firm!
Each props the other, and so stand is made
By our embodied cowards that grow brave.
The Monastery called of Convertites,
Meant to help women because these helped Christ, —
A thing existent only while it acts,
Does as designed, else a nonentity, —
For what is an idea unrealized? —
Pompilia is consigned to these for help.
They do help: they are prompt to testify
To her pure life and saintly dying days.
She dies, and lo, who seemed so poor, proves rich!
What does the body that lives through helpfulness
To women for Christ's sake? The kiss turns bite,
The dove's note changes to the crow's cry: judge!
"Seeing that this our Convent claims of right
What goods belong to those we succor, be
The same proved women of dishonest life, —
And seeing that this Trial made appear
Pompilia was in such predicament, —
The Convent hereupon pretends to said
Succession of Pompilia, issues writ,
And takes possession by the Fisc's advice."
Such is their attestation to the cause
Of Christ, who had one saint at least, they hoped:
But, is a title-deed to filch, a corpse

To slander, and an infant-heir to cheat?
Christ must give up his gains then! They unsay
All the fine speeches, — who was saint is whore.
Why, scripture yields no parallel for this!
The soldiers only threw dice for Christ's coat;
We want another legend of the Twelve
Disputing if it was Christ's coat at all,
Claiming as prize the woof of price — for why?
The Master was a thief, purloined the same,
Or paid for it out of the common bag!
Can it be this is end and outcome, all
I take with me to show as stewardship's fruit,
The best yield of the latest time, this year
The seventeen-hundredth since God died for man?
Is such effect proportionate to cause?
And still the terror keeps on the increase
When I perceive . . . how can I blink the fact?
That the fault, the obduracy to good,
Lies not with the impracticable stuff
Whence man is made, his very nature's fault,
As if it were of ice the moon may gild
Not melt, or stone 't was meant the sun should warm
Not make bear flowers, — nor ice nor stone to blame:
But it can melt, that ice, can bloom, that stone,
Impassible to rule of day and night!
This terrifies me, thus compelled perceive,
Whatever love and faith we looked should spring
At advent of the authoritative star,
Which yet lie sluggish, curdled at the source, —
These have leapt forth profusely in old time,
These still respond with promptitude to-day,
At challenge of — what unacknowledged powers
O' the air, what uncommissioned meteors, warmth
By law, and light by rule should supersede?
For see this priest, this Caponsacchi, stung
At the first summons, — "Help for honor's sake,
Play the man, pity the oppressed!" — no pause,
How does he lay about him in the midst,
Strike any foe, right wrong at any risk,
All blindness, bravery and obedience! — blind?
Ay, as a man would be inside the sun,
Delirious with the plenitude of light
Should interfuse him to the finger-ends —
Let him rush straight, and how shall he go wrong?
Where are the Christians in their panoply?
The loins we girt about with truth, the breasts

Righteousness plated round, the shield of faith,
The helmet of salvation, and that sword
O' the Spirit, even the word of God, — where these?
Slunk into corners! Oh, I hear at once
Hubbub of protestation! "What, we monks,
We friars, of such an order, such a rule,
Have not we fought, bled, left our martyr-mark
At every point along the boundary-line
'Twixt true and false, religion and the world,
Where this or the other dogma of our Church
Called for defence?" And I, despite myself,
How can I but speak loud what truth speaks low,
"Or better than the best, or nothing serves!
What boots deed, I can cap and cover straight
With such another doughtiness to match,
Done at an instinct of the natural man?"
Immolate body, sacrifice soul too, —
Do not these publicans the same? Outstrip!
Or else stop race you boast runs neck and neck,
You with the wings, they with the feet, — for shame!
Oh, I remark your diligence and zeal!
Five years long, now, rounds faith into my ears,
"Help thou, or Christendom is done to death!"
Five years since, in the Province of To-kien,
Which is in China as some people know,
Maigrot, my Vicar Apostolic there,
Having a great qualm, issues a decree.
Alack, the converts use as God's name, not
Tien-chu but plain *Tien* or else mere *Shang-ti*,
As Jesuits please to fancy politic,
While, say Dominicans, it calls down fire, —
For *Tien* means heaven, and *Shang-ti*, supreme prince,
While *Tien-chu* means the lord of heaven: all cry,
"There is no business urgent for dispatch
As that thou send a legate, specially
Cardinal Tournon, straight to Pekin, there
To settle and compose the difference!"
So have I seen a potentate all fume
For some infringement of his realm's just right,
Some menace to a mud-built straw-thatched farm
O' the frontier; while inside the mainland lie,
Quite undisputed-for in solitude,
Whole cities plague may waste or famine sap:
What if the sun crumble, the sands encroach,
While he looks on sublimely at his ease?
How does their ruin touch the empire's bound?

And is this little all that was to be?
Where is the gloriously-decisive change,
Metamorphosis the immeasurable
Of human clay to divine gold, we looked
Should, in some poor sort, justify its price?
Had an adept of the mere Rosy Cross
Spent his life to consummate the Great Work,
Would not we start to see the stuff it touched
Yield not a grain more than the vulgar got
By the old smelting-process years ago?
If this were sad to see in just the sage
Who should profess so much, perform no more,
What is it when suspected in that Power
Who undertook to make and made the world,
Devised and did effect man, body and soul,
Ordained salvation for them both, and yet . . .
Well, is the thing we see, salvation?
I
Put no such dreadful question to myself,
Within whose circle of experience burns
The central truth, Power, Wisdom, Goodness, — God:
I must outlive a thing ere know it dead:
When I outlive the faith there is a sun,
When I lie, ashes to the very soul, —
Some one, not I, must wail above the heap,
"He died in dark whence never morn arose."
While I see day succeed the deepest night —
How can I speak but as I know? — my speech
Must be, throughout the darkness, "It will end:
The light that did burn, will burn!" Clouds obscure —
But for which obscuration all were bright?
Too hastily concluded! Sun-suffused,
A cloud may soothe the eye made blind by blaze, —
Better the very clarity of heaven:
The soft streaks are the beautiful and dear.
What but the weakness in a faith supplies
The incentive to humanity, no strength
Absolute, irresistible, comports?
How can man love but what he yearns to help?
And that which men think weakness within strength,
But angels know for strength and stronger yet —
What were it else but the first things made new,
But repetition of the miracle,
The divine instance of self-sacrifice
That never ends and aye begins for man?
So, never I miss footing in the maze,
No, — I have light nor fear the dark at all.

But are mankind not real, who pace outside
My petty circle, world that 's measured me?
And when they stumble even as I stand,
Have I a right to stop ear when they cry,
As they were phantoms who took clouds for crags,
Tripped and fell, where man's march might safely move?
Beside, the cry is other than a ghost's,
When out of the old time there pleads some bard,
Philosopher, or both, and — whispers not,
But words it boldly. "The inward work and worth
Of any mind, what other mind may judge
Save God who only knows the thing He made,
The veritable service He exacts?
It is the outward product men appraise.
Behold, an engine hoists a tower aloft:
'I looked that it should move the mountain too!'
Or else 'Had just a turret toppled down,
Success enough!' — may say the Machinist
Who knows what less or more result might be:
But we, who see that done we cannot do,
'A feat beyond man's force,' we men must say.
Regard me and that shake I gave the world!
I was born, not so long before Christ's birth
As Christ's birth haply did precede thy day, —
But many a watch before the star of dawn:
Therefore I lived, — it is thy creed affirms,
Pope Innocent, who art to answer me! —
Under conditions, nowise to escape,
Whereby salvation was impossible.
Each impulse to achieve the good and fair,
Each aspiration to the pure and true,
Being without a warrant or an aim,
Was just as sterile a felicity
As if the insect, born to spend his life
Soaring his circles, stopped them to describe
(Painfully motionless in the mid-air)
Some word of weighty counsel for man's sake,
Some 'Know thyself' or 'Take the golden mean!'
— Forewent his happy dance and the glad ray,
Died half an hour the sooner and was dust.
I, born to perish like the brutes, or worse,
Why not live brutishly, obey brutes' law?
But I, of body as of soul complete,
A gymnast at the games, philosopher
I' the schools, who painted, and made music, — all
Glories that met upon the tragic stage

When the Third Poet's tread surprised the Two, —
Whose lot fell in a land where life was great
And sense went free and beauty lay profuse,
I, untouched by one adverse circumstance,
Adopted virtue as my rule of life,
Waived all reward, loved but for loving's sake,
And, what my heart taught me, I taught the world,
And have been teaching now two thousand years.
Witness my work, — plays that should please, forsooth!
'They might please, they may displease, they shall teach,
For truth's sake,' so I said, and did, and do.
Five hundred years ere Paul spoke, Felix heard, —
How much of temperance and righteousness,
Judgment to come, did I find reason for,
Corroborate with my strong style that spared
No sin, nor swerved the more from branding brow
Because the sinner was called Zeus and God?
How nearly did I guess at that Paul knew?
How closely come, in what I represent
As duty, to his doctrine yet a blank?
And as that limner not untruly limns
Who draws an object round or square, which square
Or round seems to the unassisted eye,
Though Galileo's tube display the same
Oval or oblong, — so, who controverts
I rendered rightly what proves wrongly wrought
Beside Paul's picture? Mine was true for me.
I saw that there are, first and above all,
The hidden forces, blind necessities,
Named Nature, but the thing's self unconceived:
Then follow — how dependent upon these,
We know not, how imposed above ourselves,
We well know — what I name the gods, a power
Various or one: for great and strong and good
Is there, and little, weak and bad there too,
Wisdom and folly: say, these make no God, —
What is it else that rules outside man's self?
A fact then, — always, to the naked eye, —
And so, the one revealment possible
Of what were unimagined else by man.
Therefore, what gods do, man may criticise,
Applaud, condemn, — how should he fear the truth? —
But likewise have in awe because of power,
Venerate for the main munificence,
And give the doubtful deed its due excuse
From the acknowledged creature of a day

To the Eternal and Divine. Thus, bold
Yet self-mistrusting, should man bear himself,
Most assured on what now concerns him most —
The law of his own life, the path he prints, —
Which law is virtue and not vice, I say, —
And least inquisitive where search least skills,
I' the nature we best give the clouds to keep.
What could I paint beyond a scheme like this
Out of the fragmentary truths where light
Lay fitful in a tenebrific time?
You have the sunrise now, joins truth to truth,
Shoots life and substance into death and void;
Themselves compose the whole we made before:
The forces and necessity grow God, —
The beings so contrarious that seemed gods,
Prove just His operation manifold
And multiform, translated, as must be,
Into intelligible shape so far
As suits our sense and sets us free to feel.
What if I let a child think, childhood-long,
That lightning, I would have him spare his eye,
Is a real arrow shot at naked orb?
The man knows more, but shuts his lids the same:
Lightning's cause comprehends nor man nor child.
Why then, my scheme, your better knowledge broke,
Presently readjusts itself, the small
Proportioned largelier, parts and whole named new:
So much, no more two thousand years have done!
Pope, dost thou dare pretend to punish me,
For not descrying sunshine at midnight,
Me who crept all-fours, found my way so far —
While thou rewardest teachers of the truth,
Who miss the plain way in the blaze of noon, —
Though just a word from that strong style of mine,
Grasped honestly in hand as guiding-staff,
Had pricked them a sure path across the bog,
That mire of cowardice and slush of lies
Wherein I find them wallow in wide day"

How should I answer this Euripides?
Paul — 't is a legend — answered Seneca,
But that was in the day-spring; noon is now,
We have got too familiar with the light.
Shall I wish back once more that thrill of dawn?
When the whole truth-touched man burned up, one fire?
— Assured the trial, fiery, fierce, but fleet,

Would, from his little heap of ashes, lend
Wings to that conflagration of the world
Which Christ awaits ere He makes all things new:
So should the frail become the perfect, rapt
From glory of pain to glory of joy; and so,
Even in the end, — the act renouncing earth,
Lands, houses, husbands, wives and children here, —
Begin that other act which finds all, lost,
Regained, in this time even, a hundredfold,
And, in the next time, feels the finite love
Blent and embalmed with the eternal life.
So does the sun ghastlily seem to sink
In those north parts, lean all but out of life,
Desist a dread mere breathing-stop, then slow
Re-assert day, begin the endless rise.
Was this too easy for our after-stage?
Was such a lighting-up of faith, in life,
Only allowed initiate, set man's step
In the true way by help of the great glow?
A way wherein it is ordained he walk,
Bearing to see the light from heaven still more
And more encroached on by the light of earth,
Tentatives earth puts forth to rival heaven,
Earthly incitements that mankind serve God
For man's sole sake, not God's and therefore man's.
Till at last, who distinguishes the sun
From a mere Druid fire on a far mount?
More praise to him who with his subtle prism
Shall decompose both beams and name the true.
In such sense, who is last proves first indeed;
For how could saints and martyrs fail see truth
Streak the night's blackness? Who is faithful now,
Who untwists heaven's white from the yellow flare
O' the world's gross torch, without night's foil that helped
Produce the Christian act so possible
When in the way stood Nero's cross and stake, —
So hard now when the world smiles "Right and wise!
Faith points the politic, the thrifty way,
Will make who plods it in the end returns
Beyond mere fool's-sport and improvidence.
We fools dance through the cornfield of this life,
Pluck ears to left and right and swallow raw,
— Nay, tread, at pleasure, a sheaf underfoot,
To get the better at some poppy-flower, —
Well aware we shall have so much less wheat
In the eventual harvest: you meantime

Waste not a spike, — the richlier will you reap!
What then? There will be always garnered meal
Sufficient for our comfortable loaf,
While you enjoy the undiminished sack!"
Is it not this ignoble confidence,
Cowardly hardihood, that dulls and damps,
Makes the old heroism impossible?

Unless . . . what whispers me of times to come?
What if it be the mission of that age
My death will usher into life, to shake
This torpor of assurance from our creed,
Reintroduce the doubt discarded, bring
That formidable danger back, we drove
Long ago to the distance and the dark?
No wild beast now prowls round the infant camp:
We have built wall and sleep in city safe:
But if some earthquake try the towers that laugh
To think they once saw lions rule outside,
And man stand out again, pale, resolute,
Prepared to die, — which means, alive at last?
As we broke up that old faith of the world,
Have we, next age, to break up this the new —
Faith, in the thing, grown faith in the report —
Whence need to bravely disbelieve report
Through increased faith i' the thing reports belie?
Must we deny, — do they, these Molinists,
At peril of their body and their soul, —
Recognized truths, obedient to some truth
Unrecognized yet, but perceptible? —
Correct the portrait by the living face,
Man's God, by God's God in the mind of man?
Then, for the few that rise to the new height,
The many that must sink to the old depth,
The multitude found fall away! A few,
E'en ere new law speak clear, may keep the old,
Preserve the Christian level, call good good
And evil evil, (even though razed and blank
The old titles,) helped by custom, habitude,
And all else they mistake for finer sense
O' the fact that reason warrants, — as before,
They hope perhaps, fear not impossibly.
At least some one Pompilia left the world
Will say "I know the right place by foot's feel,
I took it and tread firm there; wherefore change?"
But what a multitude will surely fall

Quite through the crumbling truth, late subjacent,
Sink to the next discoverable base,
Rest upon human nature, settle there
On what is firm, the lust and pride of life!
A mass of men, whose very souls even now
Seem to need re-creating, — so they slink
Worm-like into the mud, light now lays bare, —
Whose future we dispose of with shut eyes
And whisper — "They are grafted, barren twigs,
Into the living stock of Christ: may bear
One day, till when they lie death-like, not dead," —
Those who with all the aid of Christ succumb,
How, without Christ, shall they, unaided, sink?
Whither but to this gulf before my eyes?
Do not we end, the century and I?
The impatient antimasque treads close on kibe
O' the very masque's self it will mock, — on me,
Last lingering personage, the impatient mime
Pushes already, — will I block the way?
Will my slow trail of garments ne'er leave space
For pantaloon, sock, plume and castanet?
Here comes the first experimentalist
In the new order of things, — he plays a priest;
Does he take inspiration from the Church,
Directly make her rule his law of life?
Not he: his own mere impulse guides the man —
Happily sometimes, since ourselves allow
He has danced, in gayety of heart, i' the main
The right step through the maze we bade him foot.
But if his heart had prompted him break loose
And mar the measure? Why, we must submit,
And thank the chance that brought him safe so far.
Will he repeat the prodigy? Perhaps.
Can he teach others how to quit themselves,
Show why this step was right while that were wrong?
How should he? "Ask your hearts as I asked mine,
And get discreetly through the morrice too;
If your hearts misdirect you, — quit the stage,
And make amends, — be there amends to make!"
Such is, for the Augustin that was once,
This Canon Caponsacchi we see now.
"But my heart answers to another tune,"
Puts in the Abate, second in the suite;
"I have my taste too, and tread no such step!
You choose the glorious life, and may, for me!
I like the lowest of life's appetites, —

So you judge, — but the very truth of joy
To my own apprehension which decides.
Call me knave and you get yourself called fool!
I live for greed, ambition, lust, revenge;
Attain these ends by force, guile: hypocrite,
To-day, perchance to-morrow recognized
The rational man, the type of common sense."
There 's Loyola adapted to our time!
Under such guidance Guido plays his part,
He also influencing in the due turn
These last clods where I track intelligence
By any glimmer, these four at his beck
Ready to murder any, and, at their own,
As ready to murder him, — such make the world!
And, first effect of the new cause of things,
There they lie also duly, — the old pair
Of the weak head and not so wicked heart,
With the one Christian mother, wife and girl,
— Which three gifts seem to make an angel up, —
The world's first foot o' the dance is on their heads!
Still, I stand here, not off the stage though close
On the exit: and my last act, as my first,
I owe the scene, and Him who armed me thus
With Paul's sword as with Peter's key. I smite
With my whole strength once more, ere end my part,
Ending, so far as man may, this offence.
And when I raise my arm, who plucks my sleeve?
Who stops me in the righteous function, — foe
Or friend? Oh, still as ever, friends are they
Who, in the interest of outraged truth
Deprecate such rough handling of a lie!
The facts being proved and incontestable,
What is the last word I must listen to?
Perchance — "Spare yet a term this barren stock,
We pray thee dig about and dung and dress
Till he repent and bring forth fruit even yet!"
Perchance — "So poor and swift a punishment
Shall throw him out of life with all that sin:
Let mercy rather pile up pain on pain
Till the flesh expiate what the soul pays else!"
Nowise! Remonstrants on each side commence
Instructing, there 's a new tribunal now
Higher than God's — the educated man's!
Nice sense of honor in the human breast
Supersedes here the old coarse oracle —
Confirming none the less a point or so

Wherein blind predecessors worked aright
By rule of thumb: as when Christ said, — when, where?
Enough, I find it pleaded in a place, —
"All other wrongs done, patiently I take:
But touch my honor and the case is changed!
I feel the due resentment, — *nemini*
Honorem trado is my quick retort."
Right of Him, just as if pronounced to-day!
Still, should the old authority be mute
Or doubtful, or in speaking clash with new,
The younger takes permission to decide.
At last we have the instinct of the world
Ruling its household without tutelage:
And while the two laws, human and divine,
Have busied finger with this tangled case,
In pushes the brisk junior, cuts the knot,
Pronounces for acquittal. How it trips
Silverly o'er the tongue! "Remit the death!
Forgive, . . . well, in the old way, if thou please,
Decency and the relics of routine
Respected, — let the Count go free as air!
Since he may plead a priest's immunity, —
The minor orders help enough for that,
With Farinacci's license, — who decides
That the mere implication of such man,
So privileged, in any cause, before
Whatever Court except the Spiritual,
Straight quashes law-procedure, — quash it, then!
Remains a pretty loophole of escape
Moreover, that, beside the patent fact
O' the law's allowance, there 's involved the weal
O' the Popedom: a son's privilege at stake,
Thou wilt pretend the Church's interest,
Ignore all finer reasons to forgive!
But herein lies the crowning cogency —
(Let thy friends teach thee while thou tellest beads) —
That in this case the spirit of culture speaks,
Civilization is imperative.
To her shall we remand all delicate points
Henceforth, nor take irregular advice
O' the sly, as heretofore: she used to hint
Remonstrances, when law was out of sorts
Because a saucy tongue was put to rest,
An eye that roved was cured of arrogance:
But why be forced to mumble under breath
What soon shall be acknowledged as plain fact

Outspoken, say, in thy successor's time?
Methinks we see the golden age return!
Civilization and the Emperor
Succeed to Christianity and Pope.
One Emperor then, as one Pope now: meanwhile,
Anticipate a little! We tell thee 'Take
Guido's life, sapped society shall crash,
Whereof the main prop was, is, and shall be
— Supremacy of husband over wife!'
Does the man rule i' the house, and may his mate
Because of any plea dispute the same?
Oh, pleas of all sorts shall abound, be sure,
One but allowed validity, — for, harsh
And savage, for, inept and silly-sooth,
For, this and that, will the ingenious sex
Demonstrate the best master e'er graced slave:
And there 's but one short way to end the coil, —
Acknowledge right and reason steadily
I' the man and master: then the wife submits
To plain truth broadly stated. Does the time
Advise we shift — a pillar? nay, a stake
Out of its place i' the social tenement?
One touch may send a shudder through the heap
And bring it toppling on our children's heads!
Moreover, if ours breed a qualm in thee,
Give thine own better feeling play for once!
Thou, whose own life winks o'er the socket-edge,
Wouldst thou it went out in such ugly snuff
As dooming sons dead, e'en though justice prompt?
Why, on a certain feast, Barabbas' self
Was set free, not to cloud the general cheer:
Neither shalt thou pollute thy Sabbath close!
Mercy is safe and graceful. How one hears
The howl begin, scarce the three little taps
O' the silver mallet silent on thy brow, —
'His last act was to sacrifice a Count
And thereby screen a scandal of the Church!
Guido condemned, the Canon justified
Of course, — delinquents of his cloth go free!'
And so the Luthers chuckle, Calvins scowl,
So thy hand helps Molinos to the chair
Whence he may hold forth till doom's day on just
These *petit-maître* priestlings, — in the choir
Sanctus et Benedictus, with a brush
Of soft guitar-strings that obey the thumb,
Touched by the bedside, for accompaniment!

Does this give umbrage to a husband? Death
To the fool, and to the priest impunity!
But no impunity to any friend
So simply over-loyal as these four
Who made religion of their patron's cause,
Believed in him and did his bidding straight,
Asked not one question but laid down the lives
This Pope took, — all four lives together make
Just his own length of days, — so, dead they lie,
As these were times when loyalty 's a drug,
And zeal in a subordinate too cheap
And common to be saved when we spend life!
Come, 't is too much good breath we waste in words:
The pardon, Holy Father! Spare grimace,
Shrugs and reluctance! Are not we the world,
Art not thou Priam? let soft culture plead
Hecuba-like, '*non tali*' (Virgil serves)
'*Auxilio*,' and the rest! Enough, it works!
The Pope relaxes, and the Prince is loth,
The father's bowels yearn, the man's will bends,
Reply is apt. Our tears on tremble, hearts
Big with a benediction, wait the word
Shall circulate through the city in a trice,
Set every window flaring, give each man
O' the mob his torch to wave for gratitude.
Pronounce then, for our breath and patience fail!"

I will, Sirs: but a voice other than yours
Quickens my spirit. "*Quis pro Domino?*
Who is upon the Lord's side?" asked the Count.
I, who write —

"On receipt of this command,
Acquaint Count Guido and his fellows four
They die to-morrow: could it be to-night,
The better, but the work to do, takes time.
Set with all diligence a scaffold up,
Not in the customary place, by Bridge
Saint Angelo, where die the common sort;
But since the man is noble, and his peers
By predilection haunt the People's Square,
There let him be beheaded in the midst,
And his companions hanged on either side:
So shall the quality see, fear, and learn.
All which work takes time: till to-morrow, then,
Let there be prayer incessant for the five!"

For the main criminal I have no hope

Except in such a suddenness of fate.
I stood at Naples once, a night so dark
I could have scarce conjectured there was earth
Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all:
But the night's black was burst through by a blaze —
Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore,
Through her whole length of mountain visible:
There lay the city thick and plain with spires,
And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea.
So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.
Else I avert my face, nor follow him
Into that sad obscure sequestered state
Where God unmakes but to remake the soul
He else made first in vain; which must not be.
Enough, for I may die this very night:
And how should I dare die, this man let live?

Carry this forthwith to the Governor!

XI.

GUIDO.

You are the Cardinal Acciaiuoli, and you,
Abate Panciatichi — two good Tuscan names:
Acciaiuoli — ah, your ancestor it was
Built the huge battlemented convent-block
Over the little forky flashing Greve
That takes the quick turn at the foot o' the hill
Just as one first sees Florence: oh those days!
'T is Ema, though, the other rivulet,
The one-arched brown brick bridge yawns over, — yes,
Gallop and go five minutes, and you gain
The Roman Gate from where the Ema 's bridged:
Kingfishers fly there: how I see the bend
O'erturreted by Certosa which he built,
That Senescal (we styled him) of your House!
I do adjure you, help me, Sirs! My blood
Comes from as far a source: ought it to end
This way, by leakage through their scaffold-planks
Into Rome's sink where her red refuse runs?
Sirs, I beseech you by blood-sympathy,
If there be any vile experiment
In the air, — if this your visit simply prove,
When all 's done, just a well-intentioned trick,
That tries for truth truer than truth itself,
By startling up a man, ere break of day,
To tell him he must die at sunset, — pshaw!
That man 's a Franceschini; feel his pulse,
Laugh at your folly, and let 's all go sleep!
You have my last word, — innocent am I
As Innocent my Pope and murderer,
Innocent as a babe, as Mary's own,
As Mary's self, — I said, say and repeat, —
And why, then, should I die twelve hours hence? I —
Whom, not twelve hours ago, the jailer bade
Turn to my straw-truss, settle and sleep sound
That I might wake the sooner, promptlier pay
His due of meat-and-drink-indulgence, cross

His palm with fee of the good-hand, beside,
As gallants use who go at large again!
For why? All honest Rome approved my part;
Whoever owned wife, sister, daughter, — nay,
Mistress, — had any shadow of any right
That looks like right, and, all the more resolved,
Held it with tooth and nail, — these manly men
Approved! I being for Rome, Rome was for me.
Then, there 's the point reserved, the subterfuge
My lawyers held by, kept for last resource,
Firm should all else — the impossible fancy! — fail,
And sneaking burgess-spirit win the day.
The knaves! One plea at least would hold, — they laughed, —
One grappling-iron scratch the bottom-rock
Even should the middle mud let anchor go!
I hooked my cause on to the Clergy's, — plea
Which, even if law tipped off my hat and plume,
Revealed my priestly tonsure, saved me so.
The Pope moreover, this old Innocent,
Being so meek and mild and merciful,
So fond o' the poor and so fatigued of earth,
So . . . fifty thousand devils in deepest hell!
Why must he cure us of our strange conceit
Of the angel in man's likeness, that we loved
And looked should help us at a pinch? He help?
He pardon? Here 's his mind and message — death!
Thank the good Pope! Now, is he good in this,
Never mind, Christian, — no such stuff 's extant, —
But will my death do credit to his reign,
Show he both lived and let live, so was good?
Cannot I live if he but like? "The law!"
Why, just the law gives him the very chance,
The precise leave to let my life alone,
Which the archangelic soul of him (he says)
Yearns after! Here they drop it in his palm,
My lawyers, capital o' the cursed kind, —
Drop life to take and hold and keep: but no!
He sighs, shakes head, refuses to shut hand,
Motions away the gift they bid him grasp,
And of the coyness comes — that off I run
And down I go, he best knows whither! mind,
He knows, who sets me rolling all the same!
Disinterested Vicar of our Lord,
This way he abrogates and disallows,
Nullifies and ignores, — reverts in fine

To the good and right, in detriment of me!
Talk away! Will you have the naked truth?
He 's sick of his life's supper, — swallowed lies:
So, hobbling bedward, needs must ease his maw
Just where I sit o' the doorsill. Sir Abate,
Can you do nothing? Friends, we used to frisk:
What of this sudden slash in a friend's face,
This cut across our good companionship
That showed its front so gay when both were young?
Were not we put into a beaten path,
Bid pace the world, we nobles born and bred,
We body of friends with each his 'scutcheon full
Of old achievement and impunity, —
Taking the laugh of morn and Sol's salute
As forth we fared, pricked on to breathe our steeds
And take equestrian sport over the green
Under the blue, across the crop, — what care?
If we went prancing up hill and down dale,
In and out of the level and the straight,
By the bit of pleasant byway, where was harm?
Still Sol salutes me, and the morning laughs:
I see my grandsire's hoofprints, — point the spot
Where he drew rein, slipped saddle, and stabbed knave
For daring throw gibe — much less, stone — from pale:
Then back, and on, and up with the cavalcade.
Just so wend we, now canter, now converse,
Till, 'mid the jauncing pride and jaunty port,
Something of a sudden jerks at somebody —
A dagger is out, a flashing cut and thrust,
Because I play some prank my grandsire played,
And here I sprawl: where is the company? Gone!
A trot and a trample! only I lie trapped,
Writhe in a certain novel springe just set
By the good old Pope: I 'm first prize. Warn me? Why
Apprise me that the law o' the game is changed?
Enough that I 'm a warning, as I writhe,
To all and each my fellows of the file,
And make law plain henceforward past mistake,
"For such a prank, death is the penalty!"
Pope the Five Hundredth (what do I know or care?)
Deputes your Eminency and Abateship
To announce that, twelve hours from this time, he needs
I just essay upon my body and soul
The virtue of his brand-new engine, prove
Represser of the pranksome! I 'm the first!
Thanks. Do you know what teeth you mean to try

The sharpness of, on this soft neck and throat?
I know it, — I have seen and hate it, — ay,
As you shall, while I tell you! Let me talk,
Or leave me, at your pleasure! talk I must:
What is your visit but my lure to talk?
Nay, you have something to disclose? — a smile,
At end of the forced sternness, means to mock
The heart-beats here? I call your two hearts stone!
Is your charge to stay with me till I die?
Be tacit as your bench, then! Use your ears,
I use my tongue: how glibly yours will run
At pleasant supper-time . . . God's curse! . . . to-night
When all the guests jump up, begin so brisk,
"Welcome, his Eminence who shrived the wretch!
Now we shall have the Abate's story!"

Life!
How I could spill this overplus of mine
Among those hoar-haired, shrunk-shanked odds and ends
Of body and soul old age is chewing dry!
Those windle-straws that stare while purblind death
Mows here, mows there, makes hay of juicy me,
And misses just the bunch of withered weed
Would brighten hell and streak its smoke with flame!
How the life I could shed yet never shrink,
Would drench their stalks with sap like grass in May!
Is it not terrible, I entreat you, Sirs?
With manifold and plenitudinous life,
Prompt at death's menace to give blow for threat,
Answer his "Be thou not!" by "Thus I am!" —
Terrible so to be alive yet die?

How I live, how I see! so, — how I speak!
Lucidity of soul unlocks the lips:
I never had the words at will before.
How I see all my folly at a glance!
"A man requires a woman and a wife:"
There was my folly; I believed the saw.
I knew that just myself concerned myself,
Yet needs must look for what I seemed to lack,
In a woman, — why, the woman 's in the man!
Fools we are, how we learn things when too late!
Overmuch life turns round my woman-side;
The male and female in me, mixed before,
Settle of a sudden: I 'm my wife outright
In this unmanly appetite for truth,

This careless courage as to consequence,
This instantaneous sight through things and through,
This voluble rhetoric, if you please, — 't is she!
Here you have that Pompilia whom I slew,
Also the folly for which I slew her!
                                        Fool!
And, fool-like, what is it I wander from?
What did I say of your sharp iron tooth?
Ah, — that I know the hateful thing! this way.
I chanced to stroll forth, many a good year gone,
One warm Spring eve in Rome, and unaware
Looking, mayhap, to count what stars were out,
Came on your fine axe in a frame, that falls
And so cuts off a man's head underneath,
Mannaia, — thus we made acquaintance first:
Out of the way, in a by-part o' the town,
At the Mouth-of-Truth o' the river-side, you know:
One goes by the Capitol: and wherefore coy,
Retiring out of crowded noisy Rome?
Because a very little time ago
It had done service, chopped off head from trunk,
Belonging to a fellow whose poor house
The thing must make a point to stand before.
Felice Whatsoever-was-the-name
Who stabled buffaloes and so gained bread,
(Our clowns unyoke them in the ground hard by,)
And, after use of much improper speech,
Had struck at Duke Some-title-or-other's face,
Because he kidnapped, carried away and kept
Felice's sister who would sit and sing
I' the filthy doorway while she plaited fringe
To deck the brutes with, — on their gear it goes, —
The good girl with the velvet in her voice.
So did the Duke, so did Felice, so
Did Justice, intervening with her axe.
There the man-mutilating engine stood
At ease, both gay and grim, like a Swiss guard
Off duty, — purified itself as well,
Getting dry, sweet and proper for next week, —
And doing incidental good, 't was hoped
To the rough lesson-lacking populace
Who now and then, forsooth, must right their wrongs!
There stood the twelve-foot-square of scaffold, railed
Considerately round to elbow-height,
For fear an officer should tumble thence
And sprain his ankle and be lame a month,

Through starting when the axe fell and head too!
Railed likewise were the steps whereby 't was reached.
All of it painted red: red, in the midst,
Ran up two narrow tall beams barred across,
Since from the summit, some twelve feet to reach,
The iron plate with the sharp shearing edge
Had slammed, jerked, shot, slid, — I shall soon find which!
And so lay quiet, fast in its fit place,
The wooden half-moon collar, now eclipsed
By the blade which blocked its curvature: apart,
The other half, — the under half-moon board
Which, helped by this, completes a neck's embrace, —
Joined to a sort of desk that wheels aside
Out of the way when done with, — down you kneel,
In you 're pushed, over you the other drops,
Tight you 're clipped, whiz, there 's the blade cleaves its best,
Out trundles body, down flops head on floor,
And where 's your soul gone? That, too, I shall find!
This kneeling-place was red, red, never fear!
But only slimy-like with paint, not blood,
For why? a decent pitcher stood at hand,
A broad dish to hold sawdust, and a broom
By some unnamed utensil, — scraper-rake, —
Each with a conscious air of duty done.
Underneath, loungers, — boys and some few men, —
Discoursed this platter, named the other tool,
Just as, when grooms tie up and dress a steed,
Boys lounge and look on, and elucubrate
What the round brush is used for, what the square, —
So was explained — to me the skill-less then —
The manner of the grooming for next world
Undergone by Felice What's-his-name.
There 's no such lovely month in Rome as May —
May's crescent is no half-moon of red plank,
And came now tilting o'er the wave i' the west,
One greenish-golden sea, right 'twixt those bars
Of the engine — I began acquaintance with,
Understood, hated, hurried from before,
To have it out of sight and cleanse my soul!
Here it is all again, conserved for use:
Twelve hours hence, I may know more, not hate worse.

That young May-moon-month! Devils of the deep!
Was not a Pope then Pope as much as now?
Used not he chirrup o'er the Merry Tales,
Chuckle, — his nephew so exact the wag

To play a jealous cullion such a trick
As wins the wife i' the pleasant story! Well?
Why do things change? Wherefore is Rome un-Romed?
I tell you, ere Felice's corpse was cold,
The Duke, that night, threw wide his palace-doors,
Received the compliments o' the quality
For justice done him, — bowed and smirked his best,
And in return passed round a pretty thing,
A portrait of Felice's sister's self,
Florid old rogue Albano's masterpiece,
As — better than virginity in rags —
Bouncing Europa on the back o' the bull:
They laughed and took their road the safelier home.
Ah, but times change, there 's quite another Pope,
I do the Duke's deed, take Felice's place,
And, being no Felice, lout and clout,
Stomach but ill the phrase, "I lose my head!"
How euphemistic! Lose what? Lose your ring,
Your snuff-box, tablets, kerchief! — but, your head?
I learnt the process at an early age;
'T was useful knowledge, in those same old days,
To know the way a head is set on neck.
My fencing-master urged, "Would you excel?
Rest not content with mere bold give-and-guard,
Nor pink the antagonist somehow-anyhow!
See me dissect a little, and know your game!
Only anatomy makes a thrust the thing."
Oh Cardinal, those lithe live necks of ours!
Here go the vertebræ, here 's *Atlas*, here
Axis, and here the symphyses stop short,
So wisely and well, — as, o'er a corpse, we cant, —
And here 's the silver cord which . . . what 's our word?
Depends from the gold bowl, which loosed (not "lost")
Lets us from heaven to hell, — one chop, we 're loose!
"And not much pain i' the process," quoth a sage:
Who told him? Not Felice's ghost, I think!
Such "losing" is scarce Mother Nature's mode.
She fain would have cord ease itself away,
Worn to a thread by threescore years and ten,
Snap while we slumber: that seems bearable.
I 'm told one clot of blood extravasate
Ends one as certainly as Roland's sword, —
One drop of lymph suffused proves Oliver's mace, —
Intruding, either of the pleasant pair,
On the arachnoid tunic of my brain.
That 's Nature's way of loosing cord! — but Art,

How of Art's process with the engine here,
When bowl and cord alike are crushed across,
Bored between, bruised through? Why, if Fagon's self,
The French Court's pride, that famed practitioner,
Would pass his cold pale lightning of a knife,
Pistoja-ware, adroit 'twixt joint and joint,
With just a "See how facile, gentlefolk!" —
The thing were not so bad to bear! Brute force
Cuts as he comes, breaks in, breaks on, breaks out
O' the hard and soft of you: is that the same?
A lithe snake thrids the hedge, makes throb no leaf:
A heavy ox sets chest to brier and branch,
Bursts somehow through, and leaves one hideous hole
Behind him!

And why, why must this needs be?
Oh, if men were but good! They are not good,
Nowise like Peter: people called him rough,
But if, as I left Rome, I spoke the Saint,
— "*Petrus, quo vadis?*" — doubtless, I should hear,
"To free the prisoner and forgive his fault!
I plucked the absolute dead from God's own bar,
And raised up Dorcas, — why not rescue thee?"
What would cost one such nullifying word?
If Innocent succeeds to Peter's place,
Let him think Peter's thought, speak Peter's speech!
I say, he is bound to it: friends, how say you?
Concede I be all one bloodguiltiness
And mystery of murder in the flesh,
Why should that fact keep the Pope's mouth shut fast?
He execrates my crime, — good! — sees hell yawn
One inch from the red plank's end which I press, —
Nothing is better! What 's the consequence?
How should a Pope proceed that knows his cue?
Why, leave me linger out my minute here,
Since close on death comes judgment and comes doom,
Not crib at dawn its pittance from a sheep
Destined ere dewfall to be butcher's-meat!
Think, Sirs, if I have done you any harm,
And you require the natural revenge,
Suppose, and so intend to poison me,
— Just as you take and slip into my draught
The paperful of powder that clears scores,
You notice on my brow a certain blue:
How you both overset the wine at once!
How you both smile, "Our enemy has the plague!

Twelve hours hence he 'll be scraping his bones bare
Of that intolerable flesh, and die,
Frenzied with pain: no need for poison here!
Step aside and enjoy the spectacle!"
Tender for souls are you, Pope Innocent!
Christ's maxim is — one soul outweighs the world:
Respite me, save a soul, then, curse the world!
"No," venerable sire, I hear you smirk,
"No: for Christ's gospel changes names, not things,
Renews the obsolete, does nothing more!
Our fire-new gospel is re-tinkered law,
Our mercy, justice, — Jove 's rechristened God, —
Nay, whereas, in the popular conceit,
'T is pity that old harsh Law somehow limps,
Lingers on earth, although Law's day be done,
Else would benignant Gospel interpose,
Not furtively as now, but bold and frank
O'erflutter us with healing in her wings,
Law being harshness, Gospel only love —
We tell the people, on the contrary,
Gospel takes up the rod which Law lets fall;
Mercy is vigilant when justice sleeps!
Does Law permit a taste of Gospel-grace?
The secular arm allow the spiritual power
To act for once? — no compliment so fine
As that our Gospel handsomely turn harsh,
Thrust victim back on Law the nice and coy!"
Yes, you do say so, — else you would forgive
Me, whom Law does not touch but tosses you!
Don't think to put on the professional face!
You know what I know, — casuists as you are,
Each nerve must creep, each hair start, sting and stand,
At such illogical inconsequence!
Dear my friends, do but see! A murder 's tried,
There are two parties to the cause: I 'm one,
— Defend myself, as somebody must do:
I have the best o' the battle: that 's a fact,
Simple fact, — fancies find no place just now.
What though half Rome condemned me? Half approved
And, none disputes, the luck is mine at last,
All Rome, i' the main, acquitting me: whereon,
What has the Pope to ask but "How finds Law?"
"I find," replies Law, "I have erred this while:
Guilty or guiltless, Guido proves a priest,
No layman: he is therefore yours, not mine:
I bound him: loose him, you whose will is Christ's!"

And now what does this Vicar of our Lord,
Shepherd o' the flock, — one of whose charge bleats sore
For crook's help from the quag wherein it drowns?
Law suffers him employ the crumpled end:
His pleasure is to turn staff, use the point,
And thrust the shuddering sheep, he calls a wolf,
Back and back, down and down to where hell gapes!
"Guiltless," cries Law — "Guilty," corrects the Pope!
"Guilty," for the whim's sake! "Guilty," he somehow thinks,
And anyhow says: 't is truth; he dares not lie!

Others should do the lying. That 's the cause
Brings you both here: I ought in decency
Confess to you that I deserve my fate,
Am guilty, as the Pope thinks, — ay, to the end,
Keep up the jest, lie on, lie ever, lie
I' the latest gasp of me! What reason, Sirs?
Because to-morrow will succeed to-day
For you, though not for me: and if I stick
Still to the truth, declare with my last breath,
I die an innocent and murdered man, —
Why, there 's the tongue of Rome will wag apace
This time to-morrow, — don't I hear the talk!
"So, to the last he proved impenitent?
Pagans have said as much of martyred saints!
Law demurred, washed her hands of the whole case.
Prince Somebody said this, Duke Something, that.
Doubtless the man 's dead, dead enough, don't fear!
But, hang it, what if there have been a spice,
A touch of . . . eh? You see, the Pope 's so old,
Some of us add, obtuse, — age never slips
The chance of shoving youth to face death first!"
And so on. Therefore to suppress such talk
You two come here, entreat I tell you lies,
And end, the edifying way. I end,
Telling the truth! Your self-styled shepherd thieves!
A thief — and how thieves hate the wolves we know:
Damage to theft, damage to thrift, all 's one!
The red hand is sworn foe of the black jaw.
That 's only natural, that 's right enough:
But why the wolf should compliment the thief
With shepherd's title, bark out life in thanks,
And, spiteless, lick the prong that spits him, — eh,
Cardinal? My Abate, scarcely thus!
There, let my sheepskin-garb, a curse on 't, go —
Leave my teeth free if I must show my shag!

Repent? What good shall follow? If I pass
Twelve hours repenting, will that fact hold fast
The thirteenth at the horrid dozen's end?
If I fall forthwith at your feet, gnash, tear,
Foam, rave, to give your story the due grace,
Will that assist the engine half-way back
Into its hiding-house? — boards, shaking now,
Bone against bone, like some old skeleton bat
That wants, at winter's end, to wake and prey!
Will howling put the spectre back to sleep?
Ah, but I misconceive your object, Sirs!
Since I want new life like the creature, — life,
Being done with here, begins i' the world away:
I shall next have "Come, mortals, and be judged!"
There 's but a minute betwixt this and then:
So, quick, be sorry since it saves my soul!
Sirs, truth shall save it, since no lies assist!
Hear the truth, you, whatever you style yourselves,
Civilization and society!
Come, one good grapple, I with all the world!
Dying in cold blood is the desperate thing;
The angry heart explodes, bears off in blaze
The indignant soul, and I 'm combustion-ripe.
Why, you intend to do your worst with me!
That 's in your eyes! You dare no more than death,
And mean no less. I must make up my mind!
So Pietro — when I chased him here and there,
Morsel by morsel cut away the life
I loathed — cried for just respite to confess
And save his soul: much respite did I grant!
Why grant me respite who deserve my doom?
Me — who engaged to play a prize, fight you,
Knowing your arms, and foil you, trick for trick,
At rapier-fence, your match and, maybe, more.
I knew that if I chose sin certain sins,
Solace my lusts out of the regular way
Prescribed me, I should find you in the path,
Have to try skill with a redoubted foe;
You would lunge, I would parry, and make end.
At last, occasion of a murder comes:
We cross blades, I, for all my brag, break guard,
And in goes the cold iron at my breast,
Out at my back, and end is made of me.
You stand confessed the adroiter swordsman, — ay,
But on your triumph you increase, it seems,
Want more of me than lying flat on face:

I ought to raise my ruined head, allege
Not simply I pushed worse blade o' the pair,
But my antagonist dispensed with steel!
There was no passage of arms, you looked me low,
With brow and eye abolished cut-and-thrust,
Nor used the vulgar weapon! This chance scratch,
This incidental hurt, this sort of hole
I' the heart of me? I stumbled, got it so!
Fell on my own sword as a bungler may!
Yourself proscribe such heathen tools, and trust
To the naked virtue: it was virtue stood
Unarmed and awed me, — on my brow there burned
Crime out so plainly, intolerably red,
That I was fain to cry — "Down to the dust
With me, and bury there brow, brand and all!"
Law had essayed the adventure, — but what 's Law?
Morality exposed the Gorgon shield!
Morality and Religion conquer me.
If Law sufficed would you come here, entreat
I supplement law, and confess forsooth?
Did not the Trial show things plain enough?
"Ah, but a word of the man's very self
Would somehow put the keystone in its place
And crown the arch!" Then take the word you want!

I say that, long ago, when things began,
All the world made agreement, such and such
Were pleasure-giving profit-bearing acts,
But henceforth extra-legal, nor to be:
You must not kill the man whose death would please
And profit you, unless his life stop yours
Plainly, and need so be put aside:
Get the thing by a public course, by law,
Only no private bloodshed as of old!
All of us, for the good of every one,
Renounced such license and conformed to law:
Who breaks law, breaks pact therefore, helps himself
To pleasure and profit over and above the due,
And must pay forfeit, — pain beyond his share:
For, pleasure being the sole good in the world,
Any one's pleasure turns to some one's pain,
So, law must watch for every one, — say we,
Who call things wicked that give too much joy,
And nickname mere reprisal, envy makes,
Punishment: quite right! thus the world goes round.
I, being well aware such pact there was,

I, in my time who found advantage come
Of law's observance and crime's penalty, —
Who, but for wholesome fear law bred in friends,
Had doubtless given example long ago,
Furnished forth some friend's pleasure with my pain,
And, by my death, pieced out his scanty life, —
I could not, for that foolish life of me,
Help risking law's infringement, — I broke bond,
And needs must pay price, — wherefore, here 's my head,
Flung with a flourish! But, repentance too?
But pure and simple sorrow for law's breach
Rather than blunderer's-ineptitude?
Cardinal, no! Abate, scarcely thus!
'T is the fault, not that I dared try a fall
With Law and straightway am found undermost,
But that I failed to see, above man's law,
God's precept you, the Christians, recognize?
Colly my cow! Don't fidget, Cardinal!
Abate, cross your breast and count your beads
And exorcise the devil, for here he stands
And stiffens in the bristly nape of neck,
Daring you drive him hence! You, Christians both?
I say, if ever was such faith at all
Born in the world, by your community
Suffered to live its little tick of time,
'T is dead of age, now, ludicrously dead;
Honor its ashes, if you be discreet,
In epitaph only! For, concede its death,
Allow extinction, you may boast unchecked
What feats the thing did in a crazy land
At a fabulous epoch, — treat your faith, that way,
Just as you treat your relics: "Here 's a shred
Of saintly flesh, a scrap of blessed bone,
Raised King Cophetua, who was dead, to life
In Mesopotamy twelve centuries since,
Such was its virtue!" — twangs the Sacristan,
Holding the shrine-box up, with hands like feet
Because of gout in every finger-joint:
Does he bethink him to reduce one knob,
Allay one twinge by touching what he vaunts?
I think he half uncrooks fist to catch fee,
But, for the grace, the quality of cure, —
Cophetua was the man put that to proof!
Not otherwise, your faith is shrined and shown
And shamed at once: you banter while you bow!
Do you dispute this? Come, a monster-laugh,

A madman's laugh, allowed his Carnival
Later ten days than when all Rome, but he,
Laughed at the candle-contest: mine 's alight,
'T is just it sputter till the puff o' the Pope
End it to-morrow and the world turn Ash.
Come, thus I wave a wand and bring to pass
In a moment, in the twinkle of an eye,
What but that — feigning everywhere grows fact,
Professors turn possessors, realize
The faith they play with as a fancy now,
And bid it operate, have full effect
On every circumstance of life, to-day,
In Rome, — faith's flow set free at fountain-head!
Now, you 'll own, at this present, when I speak,
Before I work the wonder, there 's no man
Woman or child in Rome, faith's fountain-head,
But might, if each were minded, realize
Conversely unbelief, faith's opposite —
Set it to work on life unflinchingly,
Yet give no symptom of an outward change:
Why should things change because men disbelieve?
What 's incompatible, in the whited tomb,
With bones and rottenness one inch below?
What saintly act is done in Rome to-day
But might be prompted by the devil, — "is"
I say not, — "has been, and again may be," —
I do say, full i' the face o' the crucifix
You try to stop my mouth with! Off with it!
Look in your own heart, if your soul have eyes!
You shall see reason why, though faith were fled,
Unbelief still might work the wires and move
Man, the machine, to play a faithful part.
Preside your college, Cardinal, in your cape,
Or, — having got above his head, grown Pope, —
Abate, gird your loins and wash my feet!
Do you suppose I am at loss at all
Why you crook, why you cringe, why fast or feast?
Praise, blame, sit, stand, lie or go! — all of it,
In each of you, purest unbelief may prompt,
And wit explain to who has eyes to see.
But, lo, I wave wand, make the false the true!
Here 's Rome believes in Christianity!
What an explosion, how the fragments fly
Of what was surface, mask and make-believe!
Begin now, — look at this Pope's-halberdier
In wasp-like black and yellow foolery!

He, doing duty at the corridor,
Wakes from a muse and stands convinced of sin!
Down he flings halbert, leaps the passage-length,
Pushes into the presence, pantingly
Submits the extreme peril of the case
To the Pope's self, — whom in the world beside? —
And the Pope breaks talk with ambassador,
Bids aside bishop, wills the whole world wait
Till he secure that prize, outweighs the world,
A soul, relieve the sentry of his qualm!
His Altitude the Referendary —
Robed right, and ready for the usher's word
To pay devoir — is, of all times, just then
'Ware of a master-stroke of argument
Will cut the spinal cord . . . ugh, ugh! . . . I mean,
Paralyze Molinism forevermore!
Straight he leaves lobby, trundles, two and two,
Down steps to reach home, write, if but a word
Shall end the impudence: he leaves who likes
Go pacify the Pope: there 's Christ to serve!
How otherwise would men display their zeal?
If the same sentry had the least surmise
A powder-barrel 'neath the pavement lay
In neighborhood with what might prove a match,
Meant to blow sky-high Pope and presence both —
Would he not break through courtiers, rank and file,
Bundle up, bear off, and save body so,
The Pope, no matter for his priceless soul?
There 's no fool's-freak here, nought to soundly swinge,
Only a man in earnest, you 'll so praise
And pay and prate about, that earth shall ring!
Had thought possessed the Referendary
His jewel-case at home was left ajar,
What would be wrong in running, robes awry,
To be beforehand with the pilferer?
What talk then of indecent haste? Which means,
That both these, each in his degree, would do
Just that — for a comparative nothing's sake,
And thereby gain approval and reward —
Which, done for what Christ says is worth the world,
Procures the doer curses, cuffs and kicks.
I call such difference 'twixt act and act,
Sheer lunacy unless your truth on lip
Be recognized a lie in heart of you!
How do you all act, promptly or in doubt,
When there 's a guest poisoned at supper-time

And he sits chatting on with spot on cheek?
"Pluck him by the skirt, and round him in the ears,
Have at him by the beard, warn anyhow!"
Good; and this other friend that 's cheat and thief
And dissolute, — go stop the devil's feast,
Withdraw him from the imminent hell-fire!
Why, for your life, you dare not tell your friend,
"You lie, and I admonish you for Christ!"
Who yet dare seek that same man at the Mass
To warn him — on his knees, and tinkle near, —
He left a cask a-tilt, a tap unturned,
The Trebbian running: what a grateful jump
Out of the Church rewards your vigilance!
Perform that selfsame service just a thought
More maladroitly, — since a bishop sits
At function! — and he budges not, bites lip, —
"You see my case: how can I quit my post?
He has an eye to any such default.
See to it, neighbor, I beseech your love!"
He and you know the relative worth of things,
What is permissible or inopportune.
Contort your brows! You know I speak the truth:
Gold is called gold, and dross called dross, i' the Book:
Gold you let lie and dross pick up and prize!
— Despite your muster of some fifty monks
And nuns a-maundering here and mumping there,
Who could, and on occasion would, spurn dross,
Clutch gold, and prove their faith a fact so far, —
I grant you! Fifty times the number squeak
And gibber in the madhouse — firm of faith,
This fellow, that his nose supports the moon;
The other, that his straw hat crowns him Pope:
Does that prove all the world outside insane?
Do fifty miracle-mongers match the mob
That acts on the frank faithless principle,
Born-baptized-and-bred Christian-atheists, each
With just as much a right to judge as you, —
As many senses in his soul, and nerves
I' neck of him as I, — whom, soul and sense,
Neck and nerve, you abolish presently, —
I being the unit in creation now
Who pay the Maker, in this speech of mine,
A creature's duty, spend my last of breath
In bearing witness, even by my worst fault,
To the creature's obligation, absolute,
Perpetual: my worst fault protests, "The faith

Claims all of me: I would give all she claims,
But for a spice of doubt: the risk 's too rash:
Double or quits, I play, but, all or nought,
Exceeds my courage: therefore, I descend
To the next faith with no dubiety —
Faith in the present life, made last as long
And prove as full of pleasure as may hap,
Whatever pain it cause the world." I 'm wrong?
I 've had my life, whate'er I lose: I 'm right?
I 've got the single good there was to gain.
Entire faith, or else complete unbelief!
Aught between has my loathing and contempt,
Mine and God's also, doubtless: ask yourself,
Cardinal, where and how you like a man!
Why, either with your feet upon his head,
Confessed your caudatory, or, at large,
The stranger in the crowd who caps to you
But keeps his distance, — why should he presume?
You want no hanger-on and dropper-off,
Now yours, and now not yours but quite his own,
According as the sky looks black or bright.
Just so I capped to and kept off from faith —
You promised trudge behind through fair and foul,
Yet leave i' the lurch at the first spit of rain.
Who holds to faith whenever rain begins?
What does the father when his son lies dead,
The merchant when his money-bags take wing,
The politician whom a rival ousts?
No case but has its conduct, faith prescribes:
Where 's the obedience that shall edify?
Why, they laugh frankly in the face of faith
And take the natural course, — this rends his hair
Because his child is taken to God's breast,
That gnashes teeth and raves at loss of trash
Which rust corrupts and thieves break through and steal,
And this, enabled to inherit earth
Through meekness, curses till your blood runs cold!
Down they all drop to my low level, rest
Heart upon dungy earth that 's warm and soft,
And let who please attempt the altitudes.
Each playing prodigal son of heavenly sire,
Turning his nose up at the fatted calf,
Fain to fill belly with the husks, we swine
Did eat by born depravity of taste!

Enough of the hypocrites. But you, Sirs, you —
Who never budged from litter where I lay,

And buried snout i' the draff-box while I fed,
Cried amen to my creed's one article —
" Get pleasure, 'scape pain, — give your preference
To the immediate good, for time is brief,
And death ends good and ill and everything!
What 's got is gained, what 's gained soon is gained twice,
And — inasmuch as faith gains most — feign faith!"
So did we brother-like pass word about:
— You, now, — like bloody drunkards but half-drunk,
Who fool men yet perceive men find them fools, —
Vexed that a titter gains the gravest mouth, —
O' the sudden you must needs reintroduce
Solemnity, straight sober undue mirth
By a blow dealt me your boon companion here,
Who, using the old license, dreamed of harm
No more than snow in harvest: yet it falls!
You check the merriment effectually
By pushing your abrupt machine i' the midst,
Making me Rome's example: blood for wine!
The general good needs that you chop and change!
I may dislike the hocus-pocus, — Rome,
The laughter-loving people, won't they stare
Chapfallen! — while serious natures sermonize,
" The magistrate, he beareth not the sword
In vain; who sins may taste its edge, we see!"
Why my sin, drunkards? Where have I abused
Liberty, scandalized you all so much?
Who called me, who crooked finger till I came,
Fool that I was, to join companionship?
I knew my own mind, meant to live my life,
Elude your envy, or else make a stand,
Take my own part and sell you my life dear.
But it was " Fie! No prejudice in the world
To the proper manly instinct! Cast your lot
Into our lap, one genius ruled our births,
We 'll compass joy by concert; take with us
The regular irregular way i' the wood;
You 'll miss no game through riding breast by breast,
In this preserve, the Church's park and pale,
Rather than outside where the world lies waste!"
Come, if you said not that, did you say this?
Give plain and terrible warning, " Live, enjoy!
Such life begins in death and ends in hell!
Dare you bid us assist your sins, us priests
Who hurry sin and sinners from the earth?
No such delight for us, why then for you?

Leave earth, seek heaven or find its opposite!"
Had you so warned me, not in lying words
But veritable deeds with tongues of flame,
That had been fair, that might have struck a man,
Silenced the squabble between soul and sense,
Compelled him to make mind up, take one course
Or the other, peradventure! — wrong or right,
Foolish or wise, you would have been at least
Sincere, no question, — forced me choose, indulge
Or else renounce my instincts, still play wolf
Or find my way submissive to your fold,
Be red-crossed on my fleece, one sheep the more.
But you as good as bade me wear sheep's-wool
Over wolf's-skin, suck blood and hide the noise
By mimicry of something like a bleat, —
Whence it comes that because, despite my care,
Because I smack my tongue too loud for once,
Drop baaing, here 's the village up in arms!
Have at the wolf's throat, you who hate the breed!
Oh, were it only open yet to choose —
One little time more — whether I 'd be free
Your foe, or subsidized your friend forsooth!
Should not you get a growl through the white fangs
In answer to your beckoning! Cardinal,
Abate, managers o' the multitude,
I 'd turn your gloved hands to account, be sure!
You should manipulate the coarse rough mob:
'T is you I 'd deal directly with, not them, —
Using your fears: why touch the thing myself
When I could see you hunt, and then cry "Shares!
Quarter the carcass or we quarrel; come,
Here 's the world ready to see justice done!"
Oh, it had been a desperate game, but game
Wherein the winner's chance were worth the pains!
We 'd try conclusions! — at the worst, what worse
Than this Mannaia-machine, each minute's talk
Helps push an inch the nearer me? Fool, fool!

You understand me and forgive, sweet Sirs?
I blame you, tear my hair and tell my woe —
All 's but a flourish, figure of rhetoric!
One must try each expedient to save life.
One makes fools look foolisher fifty-fold
By putting in their place men wise like you,
To take the full force of an argument
Would buffet their stolidity in vain.

If you should feel aggrieved by the mere wind
O' the blow that means to miss you and maul them,
That 's my success! Is it not folly, now,
To say with folk, "A plausible defence —
We see through notwithstanding, and reject"?
Reject the plausible they do, these fools,
Who never even make pretence to show
One point beyond its plausibility
In favor of the best belief they hold!
"Saint Somebody-or-other raised the dead:"
Did he? How do you come to know as much?
"Know it, what need? The story 's plausible,
Avouched for by a martyrologist,
And why should good men sup on cheese and leeks
On such a saint's day, if there were no saint?"
I praise the wisdom of these fools, and straight
Tell them my story — "plausible, but false!"
False, to be sure! What else can story be
That runs — a young wife tired of an old spouse,
Found a priest whom she fled away with, — both
Took their full pleasure in the two-days' flight,
Which a gray-headed grayer-hearted pair
(Whose best boast was, their life had been a lie)
Helped for the love they bore all liars. Oh,
Here incredulity begins! Indeed?
Allow then, were no one point strictly true,
There 's that i' the tale might seem like truth at least
To the unlucky husband, — jaundiced patch, —
Jealousy maddens people, why not him?
Say, he was maddened, so forgivable!
Humanity pleads that though the wife were true,
The priest true, and the pair of liars true,
They might seem false to one man in the world!
A thousand gnats make up a serpent's sting,
And many sly soft stimulants to wrath
Compose a formidable wrong at last,
That gets called easily by some one name
Not applicable to the single parts,
And so draws down a general revenge,
Excessive if you take crime, fault by fault.
Jealousy! I have known a score of plays,
Were listened to and laughed at in my time
As like the every-day life on all sides,
Wherein the husband, mad as a March hare,
Suspected all the world contrived his shame.
What did the wife? The wife kissed both eyes blind,

Explained away ambiguous circumstance,
And while she held him captive by the hand,
Crowned his head — you know what 's the mockery —
By half her body behind the curtain. That 's
Nature now! That 's the subject of a piece
I saw in Vallombrosa Convent, made
Expressly to teach men what marriage was!
But say, "Just so did I misapprehend,
Imagine she deceived me to my face!"
And that 's pretence too easily seen through!
All those eyes of all husbands in all plays,
At stare like one expanded peacock-tail,
Are laughed at for pretending to be keen
While horn-blind: but the moment I step forth —
Oh, I must needs o' the sudden prove a lynx
And look the heart, that stone-wall, through and through!
Such an eye, God's may be, — not yours nor mine.

Yes, presently . . . what hour is fleeting now?
When you cut earth away from under me,
I shall be left alone with, pushed beneath
Some such an apparitional dread orb
As the eye of God, since such an eye there glares:
I fancy it go filling up the void
Above my mote-self it devours, or what
Proves wrath, immensity wreaks on nothingness.
Just how I felt once, couching through the dark,
Hard by Vittiano; young I was, and gay,
And wanting to trap fieldfares: first a spark
Tipped a bent, as a mere dew-globule might
Any stiff grass-stalk on the meadow, — this
Grew fiercer, flamed out full, and proved the sun.
What do I want with proverbs, precepts here?
Away with man! What shall I say to God?
This, if I find the tongue and keep the mind —
"Do Thou wipe out the being of me, and smear
This soul from off Thy white of things, I blot!
I am one huge and sheer mistake, — whose fault?
Not mine at least, who did not make myself!"
Some one declares my wife excused me so!
Perhaps she knew what argument to use.
Grind your teeth, Cardinal, Abate, writhe!
What else am I to cry out in my rage,
Unable to repent one particle
O' the past? Oh, how I wish some cold wise man
Would dig beneath the surface which you scrape,

Deal with the depths, pronounce on my desert
Groundedly! I want simple sober sense,
That asks, before it finishes with a dog,
Who taught the dog that trick you hang him for?
You both persist to call that act a crime,
Which sense would call . . . yes, I maintain it, Sirs, . . .
A blunder! At the worst, I stood in doubt
On cross-road, took one path of many paths:
It leads to the red thing, we all see now,
But nobody saw at first: one primrose-patch
In bank, one singing-bird in bush, the less,
Had warned me from such wayfare: let me prove!
Put me back to the cross-road, start afresh!
Advise me when I take the first false step!
Give me my wife: how should I use my wife,
Love her or hate her? Prompt my action now!
There she is, there she stands alive and pale,
The thirteen-years'-old child, with milk for blood,
Pompilia Comparini, as at first,
Which first is only four brief years ago!
I stand too in the little ground-floor room
O' the father's house at Via Vittoria: see!
Her so-called mother — one arm round the waist
O' the child to keep her from the toys, let fall
At wonder I can live yet look so grim —
Ushers her in, with deprecating wave
Of the other, — and she fronts me loose at last,
Held only by the mother's finger-tip.
Struck dumb, for she was white enough before!
She eyes me with those frightened balls of black,
As heifer — the old simile comes pat —
Eyes tremblingly the altar and the priest.
The amazed look, all one insuppressive prayer, —
Might she but breathe, set free as heretofore,
Have this cup leave her lips unblistered, bear
Any cross anywhither anyhow,
So but alone, so but apart from me!
You are touched? So am I, quite otherwise,
If 't is with pity. I resent my wrong,
Being a man: I only show man's soul
Through man's flesh: she sees mine, it strikes her thus!
Is that attractive? To a youth perhaps —
Calf-creature, one-part boy to three-parts girl,
To whom it is a flattering novelty
That he, men use to motion from their path,
Can thus impose, thus terrify in turn

A chit whose terror shall be changed apace
To bliss unbearable when, grace and glow,
Prowess and pride descend the throne and touch
Esther in all that pretty tremble, cured
By the dove o' the sceptre! But myself am old,
O' the wane at least, in all things: what do you say
To her who frankly thus confirms my doubt?
I am past the prime, I scare the woman-world,
Done-with that way: you like this piece of news?
A little saucy rose-bud minx can strike
Death-damp into the breast of doughty king
Though 't were French Louis, — soul I understand, —
Saying, by gesture of repugnance, just
"Sire, you are regal, puissant, and so forth,
But — young you have been, are not, nor will be!"
In vain the mother nods, winks, bustles up,
"Count, girls incline to mature worth like you!
As for Pompilia, what 's flesh, fish or fowl
To one who apprehends no difference,
And would accept you even were you old
As you are . . . youngish by her father's side?
Trim but your beard a little, thin your bush
Of eyebrow; and for presence, portliness,
And decent gravity, you beat a boy!"
Deceive yourself one minute, if you may,
In presence of the child that so loves age,
Whose neck writhes, cords itself against your kiss,
Whose hand you wring stark, rigid with despair!
Well, I resent this; I am young in soul,
Nor old in body, — thews and sinews here, —
Though the vile surface be not smooth as once, —
Far beyond that first wheelwork which went wrong
Through the untempered iron ere 't was proof:
I am the rock man worth ten times the crude, —
Would woman see what this declines to see,
Declines to say "I see," — the officious word
That makes the thing, pricks on the soul to shoot
New fire into the half-used cinder, flesh!
Therefore 't is she begins with wronging me,
Who cannot but begin with hating her.
Our marriage follows: there she stands again!
Why do I laugh? Why, in the very gripe
O' the jaws of death's gigantic skull, do I
Grin back his grin, make sport of my own pangs?
Why from each clashing of his molars, ground
To make the devil bread from out my grist,

Leaps out a spark of mirth, a hellish toy?
Take notice we are lovers in a church,
Waiting the sacrament to make us one
And happy! Just as bid, she bears herself,
Comes and kneels, rises, speaks, is silent, — goes:
So have I brought my horse, by word and blow,
To stand stock-still and front the fire he dreads.
How can I other than remember this,
Resent the very obedience? Gain thereby?
Yes, I do gain my end and have my will, —
Thanks to whom? When the mother speaks the word,
She obeys it — even to enduring me!
There had been compensation in revolt —
Revolt 's to quell: but martyrdom rehearsed,
But predetermined saintship for the sake
O' the mother? — "Go!" thought I, "we meet again!"
Pass the next weeks of dumb contented death,
She lives, — wakes up, installed in house and home,
Is mine, mine all day-long, all night-long mine.
Good folk begin at me with open mouth:
"Now, at least, reconcile the child to life!
Study and make her love . . . that is, endure
The . . . hem! the . . . all of you though somewhat old.
Till it amount to something, in her eye,
As good as love, better a thousand times, —
Since nature helps the woman in such strait,
Makes passiveness her pleasure: failing which,
What if you give up boy-and-girl-fools'-play
And go on to wise friendship all at once?
Those boys and girls kiss themselves cold, you know,
Toy themselves tired and slink aside full soon
To friendship, as they name satiety:
Thither go you and wait their coming!" Thanks,
Considerate advisers, — but, fair play!
Had you and I, friends, started fair at first
We, keeping fair, might reach it, neck by neck,
This blessed goal, whenever fate so please:
But why am I to miss the daisied mile
The course begins with, why obtain the dust
Of the end precisely at the starting-point?
Why quaff life's cup blown free of all the beads,
The bright red froth wherein our beard should steep
Before our mouth essay the black o' the wine?
Foolish, the love-fit? Let me prove it such
Like you, before like you I puff things clear!
"The best 's to come, no rapture but content!

Not love's first glory but a sober glow,
Not a spontaneous outburst in pure boon,
So much as, gained by patience, care and toil,
Proper appreciation and esteem!"
Go preach that to your nephews, not to me
Who, tired i' the midway of my life, would stop
And take my first refreshment, pluck a rose:
What 's this coarse woolly hip, worn smooth of leaf,
You counsel I go plant in garden-plot,
Water with tears, manure with sweat and blood,
In confidence the seed shall germinate
And, for its very best, some far-off day,
Grow big, and blow me out a dog-rose bell?
Why must your nephews begin breathing spice
O' the hundred-petalled Provence prodigy?
Nay, more and worse, — would such my root bear rose —
Prove really flower and favorite, not the kind
That 's queen, but those three leaves that make one cup
And hold the hedge-bird's breakfast, — then indeed
The prize though poor would pay the care and toil!
Respect we Nature that makes least as most,
Marvellous in the minim! But this bud,
Bit through and burned black by the tempter's tooth,
This bloom whose best grace was the slug outside
And the wasp inside its bosom, — call you "rose"?
Claim no immunity from a weed's fate
For the horrible present! What you call my wife
I call a nullity in female shape,
Vapid disgust, soon to be pungent plague,
When mixed with, made confusion and a curse
By two abominable nondescripts,
That father and that mother: think you see
The dreadful bronze our boast, we Aretines,
The Etruscan monster, the three-headed thing,
Bellerophon's foe! How name you the whole beast?
You choose to name the body from one head,
That of the simple kid which droops the eye,
Hangs the neck and dies tenderly enough:
I rather see the griesly lion belch
Flame out i' the midst, the serpent writhe her rings,
Grafted into the common stock for tail,
And name the brute, Chimæra, which I slew!
How was there ever more to be — (concede
My wife's insipid harmless nullity) —
Dissociation from that pair of plagues —
That mother with her cunning and her cant —

The eyes with first their twinkle of conceit,
Then, dropped to earth in mock-demureness, — now,
The smile self-satisfied from ear to ear,
Now, the prim pursed-up mouth's protruded lips,
With deferential duck, slow swing of head,
Tempting the sudden fist of man too much, —
That owl-like screw of lid and rock of ruff!
As for the father, — Cardinal, you know,
The kind of idiot! — such are rife in Rome,
But they wear velvet commonly; good fools,
At the end of life, to furnish forth young folk
Who grin and bear with imbecility:
Since the stalled ass, the joker, sheds from jaw
Corn, in the joke, for those who laugh or starve.
But what say we to the same solemn beast
Wagging his ears and wishful of our pat,
When turned, with holes in hide and bones laid bare,
To forage for himself i' the waste o' the world,
Sir Dignity i' the dumps? Pat him? We drub
Self-knowledge, rather, into frowzy pate,
Teach Pietro to get trappings or go hang!
Fancy this quondam oracle in vogue
At Via Vittoria, this personified
Authority when time was, — Pantaloon
Flaunting his tom-fool tawdry just the same
As if Ash-Wednesday were mid-Carnival!
That 's the extreme and unforgivable
Of sins, as I account such. Have you stooped
For your own ends to bestialize yourself
By flattery of a fellow of this stamp?
The ends obtained or else shown out of reach,
He goes on, takes the flattery for pure truth, —
"You love, and honor me, of course: what next?"
What, but the trifle of the stabbing, friend? —
Which taught you how one worships when the shrine
Has lost the relic that we bent before.
Angry! And how could I be otherwise?
'T is plain: this pair of old pretentious fools
Meant to fool me: it happens, I fooled them.
Why could not these who sought to buy and sell
Me, — when they found themselves were bought and sold,
Make up their mind to the proved rule of right,
Be chattel and not chapman any more?
Miscalculation has its consequence;
But when the shepherd crooks a sheep-like thing
And meaning to get wool, dislodges fleece

And finds the veritable wolf beneath,
(How that staunch image serves at every turn!)
Does he, by way of being politic,
Pluck the first whisker grimly visible?
Or rather grow in a trice all gratitude,
Protest this sort-of-what-one-might-name sheep
Beats the old other curly-coated kind,
And shall share board and bed, if so it deign,
With its discoverer, like a royal ram?
Ay, thus, with chattering teeth and knocking knees,
Would wisdom treat the adventure! these, forsooth,
Tried whisker-plucking, and so found what trap
The whisker kept perdue, two rows of teeth —
Sharp, as too late the prying fingers felt.
What would you have? The fools transgress, the fools
Forthwith receive appropriate punishment:
They first insult me, I return the blow,
There follows noise enough: four hubbub months,
Now hue and cry, now whimpering and wail —
A perfect goose-yard cackle of complaint
Because I do not gild the geese their oats, —
I have enough of noise, ope wicket wide,
Sweep out the couple to go whine elsewhere,
Frightened a little, hurt in no respect,
And am just taking thought to breathe again,
Taste the sweet sudden silence all about,
When, there they raise it, the old noise I know,
At Rome i' the distance! "What, begun once more?
Whine on, wail ever, 't is the loser's right!"
But eh, what sort of voice grows on the wind?
Triumph it sounds and no complaint at all!
And triumph it is. My boast was premature:
The creatures, I turned forth, clapped wing and crew
Fighting-cock-fashion, — they had filched a pearl
From dung-heap, and might boast with cause enough!
I was defrauded of all bargained for:
You know, the Pope knows, not a soul but knows
My dowry was derision, my gain — muck,
My wife (the Church declared my flesh and blood),
The nameless bastard of a common whore:
My old name turned henceforth to . . . shall I say
"He that received the ordure in his face"?
And they who planned this wrong, performed this wrong,
And then revealed this wrong to the wide world,
Rounded myself in the ears with my own wrong, —
Why, these were (note hell's lucky malice, now!)

These were just they who, they alone, could act
And publish and proclaim their infamy,
Secure that men would in a breath believe
Compassionate and pardon them, — for why?
They plainly were too stupid to invent,
Too simple to distinguish wrong from right, —
Inconscious agents they, the silly-sooth,
Of heaven's retributive justice on the strong
Proud cunning violent oppressor — me!
Follow them to their fate and help your best,
You Rome, Arezzo, foes called friends of me,
They gave the good long laugh to, at my cost!
Defray your share o' the cost, since you partook
The entertainment! Do! — assured the while,
That not one stab, I dealt to right and left,
But went the deeper for a fancy — this —
That each might do me twofold service, find
A friend's face at the bottom of each wound,
And scratch its smirk a little!

Panciatichi!

There 's a report at Florence, — is it true? —
That when your relative the Cardinal
Built, only the other day, that barrack-bulk,
The palace in Via Larga, some one picked
From out the street a saucy quip enough
That fell there from its day's flight through the town,
About the flat front and the windows wide
And bulging heap of cornice, — hitched the joke
Into a sonnet, signed his name thereto,
And forthwith pinned on post the pleasantry:
For which he 's at the galleys, rowing now
Up to his waist in water, — just because
Panciatic and *lymphatic* rhymed so pat!
I hope, Sir, those who passed this joke on me
Were not unduly punished? What say you,
Prince of the Church, my patron? Nay, indeed,
I shall not dare insult your wits so much
As think this problem difficult to solve.
This Pietro and Violante then, I say,
These two ambiguous insects, changing name
And nature with the season's warmth or chill, —
Now, grovelled, grubbing toiling moiling ants,
A very synonym of thrift and peace, —
Anon, with lusty June to prick their heart,
Soared i' the air, winged flies for more offence,
Circled me, buzzed me deaf and stung me blind,

And stunk me dead with fetor in the face
Until I stopped the nuisance: there 's my crime!
Pity I did not suffer them subside
Into some further shape and final form
Of execrable life? My masters, no!
I, by one blow, wisely cut short at once
Them and their transformations of disgust,
In the snug little Villa out of hand.
"Grant me confession, give bare time for that!" —
Shouted the sinner till his mouth was stopped.
His life confessed! — that was enough for me,
Who came to see that he did penance. 'S death!
Here 's a coil raised, a pother and for what?
Because strength, being provoked by weakness, fought
And conquered, — the world never heard the like!
Pah, how I spend my breath on them, as if
'T was their fate troubled me, too hard to range
Among the right and fit and proper things!

Ay, but Pompilia, — I await your word, —
She, unimpeached of crime, unimplicate
In folly, one of alien blood to these
I punish, why extend my claim, exact
Her portion of the penalty? Yes, friends,
I go too fast: the orator 's at fault:
Yes, ere I lay her, with your leave, by them
As she was laid at San Lorenzo late,
I ought to step back, lead you by degrees,
Recounting at each step some fresh offence,
Up to the red bed, — never fear, I will!
Gaze at her, where I place her, to begin,
Confound me with her gentleness and worth!
The horrible pair have fled and left her now,
She has her husband for her sole concern:
His wife, the woman fashioned for his help,
Flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone, the bride
To groom as is the Church and Spouse to Christ:
There she stands in his presence: "Thy desire
Shall be to the husband, o'er thee shall he rule!"
— "Pompilia, who declare that you love God,
You know who said that: then, desire my love,
Yield me contentment and be ruled aright!"
She sits up, she lies down, she comes and goes,
Kneels at the couch-side, overleans the sill
O' the window, cold and pale and mute as stone,
Strong as stone also. "Well, are they not fled?

Am I not left, am I not one for all?
Speak a word, drop a tear, detach a glance,
Bless me or curse me of your own accord!
Is it the ceiling only wants your soul,
Is worth your eyes?" And then the eyes descend,
And do look at me. Is it at the meal?
"Speak!" she obeys. "Be silent!" she obeys,
Counting the minutes till I cry "Depart,"
As brood-bird when you saunter past her eggs.
Departs she just the same through door and wall
I see the same stone strength of white despair.
And all this will be never otherwise!
Before, the parents' presence lent her life:
She could play off her sex's armory,
Entreat, reproach, be female to my male,
Try all the shrieking doubles of the hare,
Go clamor to the Commissary, bid
The Archbishop hold my hands and stop my tongue,
And yield fair sport so: but the tactics change,
The hare stands stock-still to enrage the hound!
Since that day when she learned she was no child
Of those she thought her parents, — that their trick
Had tricked me whom she thought sole trickster late, —
Why, I suppose she said within herself
"Then, no more struggle for my parents' sake!
And, for my own sake, why needs struggle be?"
But is there no third party to the pact?
What of her husband's relish or dislike
For this new game of giving up the game,
This worst offence of not offending more?
I'll not believe but instinct wrought in this,
Set her on to conceive and execute
The preferable plague: how sure they probe, —
These jades, the sensitivest soft of man!
The long black hair was wound now in a wisp,
Crowned sorrow better than the wild web late:
No more soiled dress, 't is trimness triumphs now,
For how should malice go with negligence?
The frayed silk looked the fresher for her spite!
There was an end to springing out of bed,
Praying me, with face buried on my feet,
Be hindered of my pastime, — so an end
To my rejoinder, "What, on the ground at last?
Vanquished in fight, a supplicant for life?
What if I raise you? 'Ware the casting down
When next you fight me!" Then, she lay there, mine:

Now, mine she is if I please wring her neck, —
A moment of disquiet, working eyes,
Protruding tongue, a long sigh, then no more, —
As if one killed the horse one could not ride!
Had I enjoined "Cut off the hair!" — why, snap
The scissors, and at once a yard or so
Had fluttered in black serpents to the floor:
But till I did enjoin it, how she combs,
Uncurls and draws out to the complete length,
Plaits, places the insulting rope on head
To be an eyesore past dishevelment!
Is all done? Then sit still again and stare!
I advise — no one think to bear that look
Of steady wrong, endured as steadily
— Through what sustainment of deluding hope?
Who is the friend i' the background that notes all?
Who may come presently and close accounts?
This self-possession to the uttermost,
How does it differ in aught, save degree,
From the terrible patience of God?

"All which just means,
She did not love you!" Again the word is launched
And the fact fronts me! What, you try the wards
With the true key and the dead lock flies ope?
No, it sticks fast and leaves you fumbling still!
You have some fifty servants, Cardinal, —
Which of them loves you? Which subordinate
But makes parade of such officiousness
That — if there 's no love prompts it — love, the sham,
Does twice the service done by love, the true.
God bless us liars, where 's one touch of truth
In what we tell the world, or world tells us,
Of how we love each other? All the same,
We calculate on word and deed, nor err, —
Bid such a man do such a loving act,
Sure of effect and negligent of cause,
Just as we bid a horse, with cluck of tongue,
Stretch his legs arch-wise, crouch his saddled back
To foot-reach of the stirrup — all for love,
And some for memory of the smart of switch
On the inside of the foreleg — what care we?
Yet where 's the bond obliges horse to man
Like that which binds fast wife to husband? God
Laid down the law: gave man the brawny arm
And ball of fist — woman the beardless cheek
And proper place to suffer in the side:

Since it is he can strike, let her obey!
Can she feel no love? Let her show the more,
Sham the worse, damn herself praiseworthily!
Who 's that soprano, Rome went mad about
Last week while I lay rotting in my straw?
The very jailer gossiped in his praise —
How, — dressed up like Armida, though a man;
And painted to look pretty, though a fright, —
He still made love so that the ladies swooned,
Being an eunuch. "Ah, Rinaldo mine!
But to breathe by thee while Jove slays us both!"
All the poor bloodless creature never felt,
Si, do, re, mi, fa, squeak and squall — for what?
Two gold zecchines the evening. Here 's my slave,
Whose body and soul depend upon my nod,
Can't falter out the first note in the scale
For her life! Why blame me if I take the life?
All women cannot give men love, forsooth!
No, nor all pullets lay the henwife eggs —
Whereat she bids them remedy the fault,
Brood on a chalk-ball: soon the nest is stocked —
Otherwise, to the plucking and the spit!
This wife of mine was of another mood —
Would not begin the lie that ends with truth,
Nor feign the love that brings real love about:
Wherefore I judged, sentenced, and punished her.
But why particularize, defend the deed?
Say that I hated her for no one cause
Beyond my pleasure so to do, — what then?
Just on as much incitement acts the world,
All of you! Look and like! You favor one,
Browbeat another, leave alone a third, —
Why should you master natural caprice?
Pure nature! Try: plant elm by ash in file;
Both unexceptionable trees enough,
They ought to overlean each other, pair
At top, and arch across the avenue
The whole path to the pleasaunce: do they so —
Or loathe, lie off abhorrent each from each?
Lay the fault elsewhere: since we must have faults,
Mine shall have been — seeing there 's ill in the end
Come of my course — that I fare somehow worse
For the way I took: my fault . . . as God 's my judge,
I see not where my fault lies, that 's the truth!
I ought . . . oh, ought in my own interest
Have let the whole adventure go untried,

This chance by marriage, — or else, trying it,
Ought to have turned it to account, some one
O' the hundred otherwises? Ay, my friend,
Easy to say, easy to do: step right
Now you 've stepped left and stumbled on the thing,
— The red thing! Doubt I any more than you
That practice makes man perfect? Give again
The chance, — same marriage and no other wife,
Be sure I 'll edify you! That 's because
I 'm practised, grown fit guide for Guido's self.
You proffered guidance, — I know, none so well, —
You laid down law and rolled decorum out,
From pulpit-corner on the gospel-side, —
Wanted to make your great experience mine,
Save me the personal search and pains so: thanks!
Take your word on life's use? When I take his —
The muzzled ox that treadeth out the corn,
Gone blind in padding round and round one path, —
As to the taste of green grass in the field!
What do you know o' the world that 's trodden flat
And salted sterile with your daily dung,
Leavened into a lump of loathsomeness?
Take your opinion of the modes of life,
The aims of life, life's triumph or defeat,
How to feel, how to scheme, and how to do
Or else leave undone? You preached long and loud
On high-days, "Take our doctrine upon trust!
Into the mill-house with you! Grind our corn,
Relish our chaff, and let the green grass grow!"
I tried chaff, found I famished on such fare,
So made this mad rush at the mill-house-door,
Buried my head up to the ears in dew,
Browsed on the best: for which you brain me, Sirs!
Be it so. I conceived of life that way,
And still declare — life, without absolute use
Of the actual sweet therein, is death, not life.
Give me, — pay down, — not promise, which is air, —
Something that 's out of life and better still,
Make sure reward, make certain punishment,
Entice me, scare me, — I 'll forego this life;
Otherwise, no! — the less that words, mere wind,
Would cheat me of some minutes while they plague,
Balk fulness of revenge here, — blame yourselves
For this eruption of the pent-up soul
You prisoned first and played with afterward!
"Deny myself" meant simply pleasure you,

The sacred and superior, save the mark!
You, — whose stupidity and insolence
I must defer to, soothe at every turn, —
Whose swine-like snuffling greed and grunting lust
I had to wink at or help gratify, —
While the same passions, — dared they perk in me,
Me, the immeasurably marked, by God,
Master of the whole world of such as you, —
I, boast such passions? 'T was, "Suppress them straight!
Or stay, we 'll pick and choose before destroy.
Here 's wrath in you, a serviceable sword, —
Beat it into a ploughshare! What 's this long
Lance-like ambition? Forge a pruning-hook,
May be of service when our vines grow tall!
But — sword used swordwise, spear thrust out as spear?
Anathema! Suppression is the word!"
My nature, when the outrage was too gross,
Widened itself an outlet over-wide
By way of answer, sought its own relief
With more of fire and brimstone than you wished.
All your own doing: preachers, blame yourselves!

'T is I preach while the hour-glass runs and runs!
God keep me patient! All I say just means —
My wife proved, whether by her fault or mine, —
That 's immaterial, — a true stumbling-block
I' the way of me her husband. I but plied
The hatchet yourselves use to clear a path,
Was politic, played the game you warrant wins,
Plucked at law's robe a-rustle through the courts,
Bowed down to kiss divinity's buckled shoe
Cushioned i' the church: efforts all wide the aim!
Procedures to no purpose! Then flashed truth.
The letter kills, the spirit keeps alive
In law and gospel: there be nods and winks
Instruct a wise man to assist himself
In certain matters, nor seek aid at all.
"Ask money of me," — quoth the clownish saw, —
"And take my purse! But, — speaking with respect, —
Need you a solace for the troubled nose?
Let everybody wipe his own himself!"
Sirs, tell me free and fair! Had things gone well
At the wayside inn: had I surprised asleep
The runaways, as was so probable,
And pinned them each to other partridge-wise,
Through back and breast to breast and back, then bade

Bystanders witness if the spit, my sword,
Were loaded with unlawful game for once —
Would you have interposed to damp the glow
Applauding me on every husband's cheek?
Would you have checked the cry, "A judgment, see!
A warning, note! Be henceforth chaste, ye wives,
Nor stray beyond your proper precinct, priests!"
If you had, then your house against itself
Divides, nor stands your kingdom any more.
Oh why, why was it not ordained just so?
Why fell not things out so nor otherwise?
Ask that particular devil whose task it is
To trip the all-but-at perfection, — slur
The line o' the painter just where paint leaves off
And life begins, — put ice into the ode
O' the poet while he cries "Next stanza — fire!"
Inscribe all human effort with one word,
Artistry's haunting curse, the Incomplete!
Being incomplete, my act escaped success.
Easy to blame now! Every fool can swear
To hole in net that held and slipped the fish.
But, treat my act with fair unjaundiced eye,
What was there wanting to a masterpiece
Except the luck that lies beyond a man?
My way with the woman, now proved grossly wrong,
Just missed of being gravely grandly right
And making mouths laugh on the other side.
Do, for the poor obstructed artist's sake,
Go with him over that spoiled work once more!
Take only its first flower, the ended act
Now in the dusty pod, dry and defunct!
I march to the Villa, and my men with me,
That evening, and we reach the door and stand.
I say . . . no, it shoots through me lightning-like
While I pause, breathe, my hand upon the latch,
"Let me forebode! Thus far, too much success:
I want the natural failure — find it where?
Which thread will have to break and leave a loop
I' the meshy combination, my brain's loom
Wove this long while, and now next minute tests?
Of three that are to catch, two should go free,
One must: all three surprised, — impossible!
Beside, I seek three and may chance on six, —
This neighbor, t' other gossip, — the babe's birth
Brings such to fireside, and folks give them wine, —
'T is late: but when I break in presently

One will be found outlingering the rest
For promise of a posset, — one whose shout
Would raise the dead down in the catacombs,
Much more the city-watch that goes its round.
When did I ever turn adroitly up
To sun some brick imbedded in the soil,
And with one blow crush all three scorpions there?
Or Pietro or Violante shambles off —
It cannot be but I surprise my wife —
If only she is stopped and stamped on, good!
That shall suffice: more is improbable.
Now I may knock!" And this once for my sake
The impossible was effected: I called king,
Queen and knave in a sequence, and cards came,
All three, three only! So, I had my way,
Did my deed: so, unbrokenly lay bare
Each tænia that had sucked me dry of juice,
At last outside me, not an inch of ring
Left now to writhe about and root itself
I' the heart all powerless for revenge! Henceforth
I might thrive: these were drawn and dead and damned.
Oh Cardinal, the deep long sigh you heave
When the load 's off you, ringing as it runs
All the way down the serpent-stair to hell!
No doubt the fine delirium flustered me,
Turned my brain with the influx of success
As if the sole need now were to wave wand
And find doors fly wide, — wish and have my will, —
The rest o' the scheme would care for itself: escape?
Easy enough were that, and poor beside!
It all but proved so, — ought to quite have proved,
Since, half the chances had sufficed, set free
Any one, with his senses at command,
From thrice the danger of my flight. But, drunk,
Redundantly triumphant, — some reverse
Was sure to follow! There 's no other way
Accounts for such prompt perfect failure then
And there on the instant. Any day o' the week,
A ducat slid discreetly into palm
O' the mute postmaster, while you whisper him —
How you the Count and certain four your knaves,
Have just been mauling who was malapert,
Suspect the kindred may prove troublesome,
Therefore, want horses in a hurry, — that
And nothing more secures you any day
The pick o' the stable! Yet I try the trick,

Double the bribe, call myself Duke for Count,
And say the dead man only was a Jew,
And for my pains find I am dealing just
With the one scrupulous fellow in all Rome —
Just this immaculate official stares,
Sees I want hat on head and sword in sheath,
Am splashed with other sort of wet than wine,
Shrugs shoulder, puts my hand by, gold and all,
Stands on the strictness of the rule o' the road!
"Where 's the Permission?" Where 's the wretched rag
With the due seal and sign of Rome's Police,
To be had for asking, half-an-hour ago?
"Gone? Get another, or no horses hence!"
He dares not stop me, we five glare too grim,
But hinders, — hacks and hamstrings sure enough,
Gives me some twenty miles of miry road
More to march in the middle of that night
Whereof the rough beginning taxed the strength
O' the youngsters, much more mine, both soul and flesh,
Who had to think as well as act: dead-beat,
We gave in ere we reached the boundary
And safe spot out of this irrational Rome, —
Where, on dismounting from our steeds next day,
We had snapped our fingers at you, safe and sound,
Tuscans once more in blessed Tuscany,
Where laws make wise allowance, understand
Civilized life and do its champions right!
Witness the sentence of the Rota there,
Arezzo uttered, the Granduke confirmed,
One week before I acted on its hint, —
Giving friend Guillichini, for his love,
The galleys, and my wife your saint, Rome's saint, —
Rome manufactures saints enough to know, —
Seclusion at the Stinche for her life.
All this, that all but was, might all have been,
Yet was not! balked by just a scrupulous knave
Whose palm was horn through handling horses' hoofs
And could not close upon my proffered gold!
What say you to the spite of fortune? Well,
The worst 's in store: thus hindered, haled this way
To Rome again by hangdogs, whom find I
Here, still to fight with, but my pale frail wife?
— Riddled with wounds by one not like to waste
The blows he dealt, — knowing anatomy, —
(I think I told you) bound to pick and choose
The vital parts! 'T was learning all in vain!

She too must shimmer through the gloom o' the grave,
Come and confront me — not at judgment-seat
Where I could twist her soul, as erst her flesh,
And turn her truth into a lie, — but there,
O' the death-bed, with God's hand between us both,
Striking me dumb, and helping her to speak,
Tell her own story her own way, and turn
My plausibility to nothingness!
Four whole days did Pompilia keep alive,
With the best surgery of Rome agape
At the miracle, — this cut, the other slash,
And yet the life refusing to dislodge,
Four whole extravagant impossible days,
Till she had time to finish and persuade
Every man, every woman, every child
In Rome, of what she would: the selfsame she
Who, but a year ago, had wrung her hands,
Reddened her eyes and beat her breasts, rehearsed
The whole game at Arezzo, nor availed
Thereby to move one heart or raise one hand!
When destiny intends you cards like these,
What good of skill and preconcerted play?
Had she been found dead, as I left her dead,
I should have told a tale brooked no reply:
You scarcely will suppose me found at fault
With that advantage! "What brings me to Rome?
Necessity to claim and take my wife:
Better, to claim and take my new-born babe, —
Strong in paternity a fortnight old,
When 't is at strongest: warily I work,
Knowing the machinations of my foe;
I have companionship and use the night:
I seek my wife and child, — I find — no child
But wife, in the embraces of that priest
Who caused her to elope from me. These two,
Backed by the pander-pair who watch the while,
Spring on me like so many tiger-cats,
Glad of the chance to end the intruder. I —
What should I do but stand on my defence,
Strike right, strike left, strike thick and threefold, slay,
Not all — because the coward priest escapes.
Last, I escape, in fear of evil tongues,
And having had my taste of Roman law."
What 's disputable, refutable here? —
Save by just this one ghost-thing half on earth,
Half out of it, — as if she held God's hand

While she leant back and looked her last at me,
Forgiving me (here monks begin to weep)
Oh, from her very soul, commending mine
To heavenly mercies which are infinite, —
While fixing fast my head beneath your knife!
'T is fate not fortune. All is of a piece!
When was it chance informed me of my youths?
My rustic four o' the family, soft swains,
What sweet surprise had they in store for me,
Those of my very household, — what did Law
Twist with her rack-and-cord-contrivance late
From out their bones and marrow? What but this —
Had no one of these several stumbling-blocks
Stopped me, they yet were cherishing a scheme,
All of their honest country homespun wit,
To quietly next day at crow of cock
Cut my own throat too, for their own behoof,
Seeing I had forgot to clear accounts
O' the instant, nowise slackened speed for that, —
And somehow never might find memory,
Once safe back in Arezzo, where things change,
And a court-lord needs mind no country lout.
Well, being the arch-offender, I die last, —
May, ere my head falls, have my eyesight free,
Nor miss them dangling high on either hand,
Like scarecrows in a hemp-field, for their pains!

And then my Trial, — 't is my Trial that bites
Like a corrosive, so the cards are packed,
Dice loaded, and my life-stake tricked away!
Look at my lawyers, lacked they grace of law,
Latin or logic? Were not they fools to the height,
Fools to the depth, fools to the level between,
O' the foolishness set to decide the case?
They feign, they flatter; nowise does it skill,
Everything goes against me: deal each judge
His dole of flattery and feigning, — why,
He turns and tries and snuffs and savors it,
As some old fly the sugar-grain, your gift;
Then eyes your thumb and finger, brushes clean
The absurd old head of him, and whisks away,
Leaving your thumb and finger dirty. Faugh!

And finally, after this long-drawn range
Of affront and failure, failure and affront, —
This path, 'twixt crosses leading to a skull,

Paced by me barefoot, bloodied by my palms
From the entry to the end, — there 's light at length,
A cranny of escape: appeal may be
To the old man, to the father, to the Pope,
For a little life — from one whose life is spent,
A little pity — from pity's source and seat,
A little indulgence to rank, privilege,
From one who is the thing personified,
Rank, privilege, indulgence, grown beyond
Earth's bearing, even, ask Jansenius else!
Still the same answer, still no other tune
From the cicala perched at the tree-top
Than crickets noisy round the root, — 't is "Die!"
Bids Law — "Be damned!" adds Gospel, — nay,
No word so frank, — 't is rather, "Save yourself!"
The Pope subjoins — "Confess and be absolved!
So shall my credit countervail your shame,
And the world see I have not lost the knack
Of trying all the spirits: yours, my son,
Wants but a fiery washing to emerge
In clarity! Come, cleanse you, ease the ache
Of these old bones, refresh our bowels, boy!"
Do I mistake your mission from the Pope?
Then, bear his Holiness the mind of me!
I do get strength from being thrust to wall,
Successively wrenched from pillar and from post
By this tenacious hate of fortune, hate
Of all things in, under, and above earth.
Warfare, begun this mean unmanly mode,
Does best to end so, — gives earth spectacle
Of a brave fighter who succumbs to odds
That turn defeat to victory. Stab, I fold
My mantle round me! Rome approves my act:
Applauds the blow which costs me life but keeps
My honor spotless: Rome would praise no more
Had I fallen, say, some fifteen years ago,
Helping Vienna when our Aretines
Flocked to Duke Charles and fought Turk Mustafa;
Nor would you two be trembling o'er my corpse
With all this exquisite solicitude.
Why is it that I make such suit to live?
The popular sympathy that 's round me now
Would break like bubble that o'er-domes a fly —
Solid enough while he lies quiet there,
But let him want the air and ply the wing,
Why, it breaks and bespatters him, what else?

Cardinal, if the Pope had pardoned me,
And I walked out of prison through the crowd,
It would not be your arm I should dare press!
Then, if I got safe to my place again,
How sad and sapless were the years to come!
I go my old ways and find things grown gray;
You priests leer at me, old friends look askance;
The mob 's in love, I 'll wager, to a man,
With my poor young good beauteous murdered wife:
For hearts require instruction how to beat,
And eyes, on warrant of the story, wax
Wanton at portraiture in white and black
Of dead Pompilia gracing ballad-sheet,
Which eyes, lived she unmurdered and unsung,
Would never turn though she paced street as bare
As the mad penitent ladies do in France.
My brothers quietly would edge me out
Of use and management of things called mine;
Do I command? "You stretched command before!"
Show anger? "Anger little helped you once!"
Advise? "How managed you affairs of old?"
My very mother, all the while they gird,
Turns eye up, gives confirmatory groan;
For unsuccess, explain it how you will,
Disqualifies you, makes you doubt yourself,
— Much more, is found decisive by your friends.
Beside, am I not fifty years of age?
What new leap would a life take, checked like mine
I' the spring at outset? Where 's my second chance?
Ay, but the babe . . . I had forgot my son,
My heir! Now for a burst of gratitude!
There 's some appropriate service to intone,
Some *gaudeamus* and thanksgiving-psalm!
Old, I renew my youth in him, and poor
Possess a treasure, — is not that the phrase?
Only I must wait patient twenty years —
Nourishing all the while, as father ought,
The excrescence with my daily blood of life.
Does it respond to hope, such sacrifice, —
Grows the wen plump while I myself grow lean?
Why, here 's my son and heir in evidence,
Who stronger, wiser, handsomer than I
By fifty years, relieves me of each load, —
Tames my hot horse, carries my heavy gun,
Courts my coy mistress, — has his apt advice
On house-economy, expenditure,

And what not? All which good gifts and great growth,
Because of my decline, he brings to bear
On Guido, but half apprehensive how
He cumbers earth, crosses the brisk young Count,
Who civilly would thrust him from the scene.
Contrariwise, does the blood-offering fail?
There 's an ineptitude, one blank the more
Added to earth in semblance of my child?
Then, this has been a costly piece of work,
My life exchanged for his! — why he, not I,
Enjoy the world, if no more grace accrue?
Dwarf me, what giant have you made of him?
I do not dread the disobedient son —
I know how to suppress rebellion there,
Being not quite the fool my father was.
But grant the medium measure of a man,
The usual compromise 'twixt fool and sage,
— You know — the tolerably-obstinate,
The not-so-much-perverse but you may train,
The true son-servant that, when parent bids
"Go work, son, in my vineyard!" makes reply
"I go, Sir!" — Why, what profit in your son
Beyond the drudges you might subsidize,
Have the same work from, at a paul the head?
Look at those four young precious olive-plants
Reared at Vittiano, — not on flesh and blood,
These twenty years, but black bread and sour wine!
I bade them put forth tender branch, hook, hold,
And hurt three enemies I had in Rome:
They did my hest as unreluctantly,
At promise of a dollar, as a son
Adjured by mumping memories of the past.
No, nothing repays youth expended so —
Youth, I say, who am young still: grant but leave
To live my life out, to the last I 'd live
And die conceding age no right of youth!
It is the will runs the renewing nerve
Through flaccid flesh that faints before the time.
Therefore no sort of use for son have I —
Sick, not of life's feast but of steps to climb
To the house where life prepares her feast, — of means
To the end: for make the end attainable
Without the means, — my relish were like yours.
A man may have an appetite enough
For a whole dish of robins ready cooked,
And yet lack courage to face sleet, pad snow,
And snare sufficiently for supper.

Thus
The time 's arrived when, ancient Roman-like,
I am bound to fall on my own sword, — why not
Say — Tuscan-like, more ancient, better still?
Will you hear truth can do no harm nor good?
I think I never was at any time
A Christian, as you nickname all the world,
Me among others: truce to nonsense now!
Name me, a primitive religionist —
As should the aboriginary be
I boast myself, Etruscan, Aretine,
One sprung — your frigid Virgil's fieriest word —
From fauns and nymphs, trunks and the heart of oak,
With — for a visible divinity —
The portent of a Jove Ægiochus
Descried 'mid clouds, lightning and thunder, couched
On topmost crag of your Capitoline:
'T is in the Seventh Æneid, — what, the Eighth?
Right, — thanks, Abate, — though the Christian 's dumb,
The Latinist 's vivacious in you yet!
I know my grandsire had our tapestry
Marked with the motto, 'neath a certain shield,
Whereto his grandson presently will give gules
To vary azure. First we fight for faiths,
But get to shake hands at the last of all:
Mine 's your faith too, — in Jove Ægiochus!
Nor do Greek gods, that serve as supplement,
Jar with the simpler scheme, if understood.
We want such intermediary race
To make communication possible;
The real thing were too lofty, we too low,
Midway hang these: we feel their use so plain
In linking height to depth, that we doff hat
And put no question nor pry narrowly
Into the nature hid behind the names.
We grudge no rite the fancy may demand;
But never, more than needs, invent, refine,
Improve upon requirement, idly wise
Beyond the letter, teaching gods their trade,
Which is to teach us: we 'll obey when taught.
Why should we do our duty past the need?
When the sky darkens, Jove is wroth, — say prayer!
When the sun shines and Jove is glad, — sing psalm!
But wherefore pass prescription and devise
Blood-offering for sweat-service, lend the rod
A pungency through pickle of our own?

Learned Abate, — no one teaches you
What Venus means and who 's Apollo here!
I spare you, Cardinal, — but, though you wince,
You know me, I know you, and both know that!
So, if Apollo bids us fast, we fast:
But where does Venus order we stop sense
When Master Pietro rhymes a pleasantry?
Give alms prescribed on Friday, — but, hold hand
Because your foe lies prostrate, — where 's the word
Explicit in the book debars revenge?
The rationale of your scheme is just
"Pay toll here, there pursue your pleasure free!"
So do you turn to use the medium-powers,
Mars and Minerva, Bacchus and the rest,
And so are saved propitiating — whom?
What all-good, all-wise, and all-potent Jove
Vexed by the very sins in man, himself
Made life's necessity when man he made?
Irrational bunglers! So, the living truth
Revealed to strike Pan dead, ducks low at last,
Prays leave to hold its own and live good days
Provided it go masque grotesquely, called
Christian not Pagan. Oh, you purged the sky
Of all gods save the One, the great and good,
Clapped hands and triumphed! But the change came fast:
The inexorable need in man for life —
(Life, you may mulct and minish to a grain
Out of the lump, so that the grain but live)
Laughed at your substituting death for life,
And bade you do your worst: which worst was done
In just that age styled primitive and pure
When Saint this, Saint that, dutifully starved,
Froze, fought with beasts, was beaten and abused
And finally ridded of his flesh by fire:
He kept life-long unspotted from the world! —
Next age, how goes the game, what mortal gives
His life and emulates Saint that, Saint this?
Men mutter, make excuse, or mutiny,
In fine are minded all to leave the new,
Stick to the old, — enjoy old liberty,
No prejudice in enjoyment, if you please,
To the new profession: sin o' the sly, henceforth!
The law stands though the letter kills: what then?
The spirit saves as unmistakably.
Omniscience sees, Omnipotence could stop,
Omnibenevolence pardons: it must be,
Frown law its fiercest, there 's a wink somewhere!

Such was the logic in this head of mine:
I, like the rest, wrote "poison" on my bread,
But broke and ate: — said "those that use the sword
Shall perish by the same;" then stabbed my foe.
I stand on solid earth, not empty air:
Dislodge me, let your Pope's crook hale me hence!
Not he, nor you! And I so pity both,
I'll make the true charge you want wit to make:
"Count Guido, who reveal our mystery,
And trace all issues to the love of life:
We having life to love and guard, like you,
Why did you put us upon self-defence?
You well knew what prompt pass-word would appease
The sentry's ire when folk infringed his bounds,
And yet kept mouth shut: do you wonder then
If, in mere decency, he shot you dead?
He can't have people play such pranks as yours
Beneath his nose at noonday: you disdained
To give him an excuse before the world
By crying 'I break rule to save our camp!'
Under the old rule, such offence were death;
And you had heard the Pontifex pronounce,
'Since you slay foe and violate the form,
Slaying turns murder, which were sacrifice
Had you, while, say, lawsuiting foe to death,
But raised an altar to the Unknown God,
Or else the Genius of the Vatican.'
Why then this pother? — all because the Pope,
Doing his duty, cried 'A foreigner,
You scandalize the natives: here at Rome
Romano vivitur more: wise men, here,
Put the Church forward and efface themselves.
The fit defence had been, — you stamped on wheat,
Intending all the time to trample tares, —
Were fain extirpate, then, the heretic,
You now find, in your haste was slain a fool:
Nor Pietro, nor Violante, nor your wife
Meant to breed up your babe a Molinist!
Whence you are duly contrite. Not one word
Of all this wisdom did you urge: which slip
Death must atone for.' "
So, let death atone!
So ends mistake, so end mistakers! — end
Perhaps to recommence, — how should I know?
Only, be sure, no punishment, no pain
Childish, preposterous, impossible,

But some such fate as Ovid could foresee, —
Byblis in fluvium, let the weak soul end
In water, *sed Lycaon in lupum*, but
The strong become a wolf forevermore!
Change that Pompilia to a puny stream
Fit to reflect the daisies on its bank!
Let me turn wolf, be whole, and sate, for once, —
Wallow in what is now a wolfishness
Coerced too much by the humanity
That 's half of me as well! Grow out of man,
Glut the wolf-nature, — what remains but grow
Into the man again, be man indeed
And all man? Do I ring the changes right?
Deformed, transformed, reformed, informed, conformed!
The honest instinct, pent and crossed through life,
Let surge by death into a visible flow
Of rapture: as the strangled thread of flame
Painfully winds, annoying and annoyed,
Malignant and maligned, through stone and ore,
Till earth exclude the stranger: vented once,
It finds full play, is recognized atop
Some mountain as no such abnormal birth.
Fire for the mount, not streamlet for the vale!
Ay, of the water was that wife of mine —
Be it for good, be it for ill, no run
O' the red thread through that insignificance!
Again, how she is at me with those eyes!
Away with the empty stare! Be holy still,
And stupid ever! Occupy your patch
Of private snow that 's somewhere in what world
May now be growing icy round your head,
And aguish at your footprint, — freeze not me,
Dare follow not another step I take,
Not with so much as those detested eyes,
No, though they follow but to pray me pause
On the incline, earth's edge that 's next to hell!
None of your abnegation of revenge!
Fly at me frank, tug while I tear again!
There 's God, go tell Him, testify your worst!
Not she! There was no touch in her of hate:
And it would prove her hell, if I reached mine!
To know I suffered, would still sadden her,
Do what the angels might to make amends!
Therefore there 's either no such place as hell,
Or thence shall I be thrust forth, for her sake,
And thereby undergo three hells, not one —

I who, with outlet for escape to heaven,
Would tarry if such flight allowed my foe
To raise his head, relieved of that firm foot
Had pinned him to the fiery pavement else!
So am I made, "who did not make myself:"
(How dared she rob my own lip of the word?)
Beware me in what other world may be! —
Pompilia, who have brought me to this pass!
All I know here, will I say there, and go
Beyond the saying with the deed. Some use
There cannot but be for a mood like mine,
Implacable, persistent in revenge.
She maundered, "All is over and at end:
I go my own road, go you where God will!
Forgive you? I forget you!" There 's the saint
That takes your taste, you other kind of men!
How you had loved her! Guido wanted skill
To value such a woman at her worth!
Properly the instructed criticise,
"What 's here, you simpleton have tossed to take
Its chance i' the gutter? This a daub, indeed?
Why, 't is a Rafael that you kicked to rags!"
Perhaps so: some prefer the pure design:
Give me my gorge of color, glut of gold
In a glory round the Virgin made for me!
Titian 's the man, not Monk Angelico
Who traces you some timid chalky ghost
That turns the church into a charnel: ay,
Just such a pencil might depict my wife!
She, — since she, also, would not change herself, —
Why could not she come in some heart-shaped cloud,
Rainbowed about with riches, royalty
Rimming her round, as round the tintless lawn
Guardingly runs the selvage cloth of gold?
I would have left the faint fine gauze untouched,
Needle-worked over with its lily and rose,
Let her bleach unmolested in the midst,
Chill that selected solitary spot
Of quietude she pleased to think was life.
Purity, pallor grace the lawn no doubt
When there 's the costly bordure to unthread
And make again an ingot: but what 's grace
When you want meat and drink and clothes and fire?

A tale comes to my mind that 's apposite —
Possibly true, probably false, a truth
Such as all truths we live by, Cardinal!

'T is said, a certain ancestor of mine
Followed — whoever was the potentate,
To Paynimrie, and in some battle, broke
Through more than due allowance of the foe,
And, risking much his own life, saved the lord's.
Battered and bruised, the Emperor scrambles up,
Rubs his eyes and looks round and sees my sire,
Picks a furze-sprig from out his hauberk-joint,
(Token how near the ground went majesty,)
And says, "Take this, and if thou get safe home,
Plant the same in thy garden-ground to grow:
Run thence an hour in a straight line, and stop:
Describe a circle round (for central point)
The furze aforesaid, reaching every way
The length of that hour's run: I give it thee, —
The central point, to build a castle there,
The space circumjacent, for fit demesne,
The whole to be thy children's heritage, —
Whom, for thy sake, bid thou wear furze on cap!"
Those are my arms: we turned the furze a tree
To show more, and the grayhound tied thereto,
Straining to start, means swift and greedy both;
He stands upon a triple mount of gold —
By Jove, then, he 's escaping from true gold
And trying to arrive at empty air!
Aha! the fancy never crossed my mind!
My father used to tell me, and subjoin,
"As for the castle, that took wings and flew:
The broad lands, — why, to traverse them to-day
Scarce tasks my gouty feet, and in my prime
I doubt not I could stand and spit so far:
But for the furze, boy, fear no lack of that,
So long as fortune leaves one field to grub!
Wherefore, hurrah for furze and loyalty!"
What may I mean, where may the lesson lurk?
"Do not bestow on man, by way of gift,
Furze without land for framework, — vaunt no grace
Of purity, no furze-sprig of a wife,
To me, i' the thick of battle for my bread,
Without some better dowry, — gold will do!"
No better gift than sordid muck? Yes, Sirs!
Many more gifts much better. Give them me!
O those Olimpias bold, those Biancas brave,
That brought a husband power worth Ormuz' wealth!
Cried, "Thou being mine, why, what but thine am I?
Be thou to me law, right, wrong, heaven and hell!

Let us blend souls, blent, thou in me, to bid
Two bodies work one pleasure! What are these
Called king, priest, father, mother, stranger, friend?
They fret thee or they frustrate? Give the word —
Be certain they shall frustrate nothing more!
And who is this young florid foolishness
That holds thy fortune in his pygmy clutch,
— Being a prince and potency, forsooth! —
He hesitates to let the trifle go?
Let me but seal up eye, sing ear to sleep
Sounder than Samson, — pounce thou on the prize
Shall slip from off my breast, and down couch-side,
And on to floor, and far as my lord's feet —
Where he stands in the shadow with the knife,
Waiting to see what Delilah dares do!
Is the youth fair? What is a man to me
Who am thy call-bird? Twist his neck — my dupe's, —
Then take the breast shall turn a breast indeed!"
Such women are there; and they marry whom?
Why, when a man has gone and hanged himself
Because of what he calls a wicked wife, —
See, if the very turpitude bemoaned
Prove not mere excellence the fool ignores!
His monster is perfection, — Circe, sent
Straight from the sun, with wand the idiot blames
As not an honest distaff to spin wool!
O thou Lucrezia, is it long to wait
Yonder where all the gloom is in a glow
With thy suspected presence? — virgin yet,
Virtuous again, in face of what 's to teach —
Sin unimagined, unimaginable, —
I come to claim my bride, — thy Borgia's self
Not half the burning bridegroom I shall be!
Cardinal, take away your crucifix!
Abate, leave my lips alone, — they bite!
Vainly you try to change what should not change,
And shall not. I have bared, you bathe my heart —
It grows the stonier for your saving dew!
You steep the substance, you would lubricate,
In waters that but touch to petrify!

You too are petrifactions of a kind:
Move not a muscle that shows mercy; rave
Another twelve hours, every word were waste!
I thought you would not slay impenitence,
But teased, from men you slew, contrition first, —

I thought you had a conscience. Cardinal,
You know I am wronged! — wronged, say, and wronged maintain.
Was this strict inquisition made for blood
When first you showed us scarlet on your back,
Called to the College? Your straightforward way
To your legitimate end, — I think it passed
Over a scantling of heads brained, hearts broke,
Lives trodden into dust! — how otherwise?
Such was the way o' the world, and so you walked.
Does memory haunt your pillow? Not a whit.
God wills you never pace your garden-path,
One appetizing hour ere dinner-time,
But your intrusion there treads out of life
A universe of happy innocent things:
Feel you remorse about that damsel-fly
Which buzzed so near your mouth and flapped your face?
You blotted it from being at a blow:
It was a fly, you were a man, and more,
Lord of created things, so took your course.
Manliness, mind, — these are things fit to save,
Fit to brush fly from: why, because I take
My course, must needs the Pope kill me? — kill you!
You! for this instrument, he throws away,
Is strong to serve a master, and were yours
To have and hold and get much good from out!
The Pope who dooms me needs must die next year;
I 'll tell you how the chances are supposed
For his successor: first the Chamberlain,
Old San Cesario, — Colloredo, next, —
Then, one, two, three, four, I refuse to name;
After these, comes Altieri; then come you —
Seventh on the list you come, unless . . . ha, ha,
How can a dead hand give a friend a lift?
Are you the person to despise the help
O' the head shall drop in pannier presently?
So a child seesaws on or kicks away
The fulcrum-stone that 's all the sage requires
To fit his lever to and move the world.
Cardinal, I adjure you in God's name,
Save my life, fall at the Pope's feet, set forth
Things your own fashion, not in words like these
Made for a sense like yours who apprehend!
Translate into the Court-conventional
"Count Guido must not die, is innocent!
Fair, be assured! But what an he were foul,

Blood-drenched and murder-crusted head to foot?
Spare one whose death insults the Emperor,
Nay, outrages the Louis you so love!
He has friends who will avenge him; enemies
Who will hate God now with impunity,
Missing the old coercive: would you send
A soul straight to perdition, dying frank
An atheist?" Go and say this, for God's sake!
— Why, you don't think I hope you 'll say one word?
Neither shall I persuade you from your stand
Nor you persuade me from my station: take
Your crucifix away, I tell you twice!

Come, I am tired of silence! Pause enough!
You have prayed: I have gone inside my soul
And shut its door behind me: 't is your torch
Makes the place dark: the darkness let alone
Grows tolerable twilight: one may grope
And get to guess at length and breadth and depth.
What is this fact I feel persuaded of —
This something like a foothold in the sea,
Although Saint Peter's bark scuds, billow-borne,
Leaves me to founder where it flung me first?
Spite of your splashing, I am high and dry!
God takes his own part in each thing he made;
Made for a reason, he conserves his work,
Gives each its proper instinct of defence.
My lamblike wife could neither bark nor bite,
She bleated, bleated, till for pity pure
The village roused up, ran with pole and prong
To the rescue, and behold the wolf 's at bay!
Shall he try bleating? — or take turn or two,
Since the wolf owns some kinship with the fox,
And, failing to escape the foe by craft,
Give up attempt, die fighting quietly?
The last bad blow that strikes fire in at eye
And on to brain, and so out, life and all,
How can it but be cheated of a pang
If, fighting quietly, the jaws enjoy
One re-embrace in mid backbone they break,
After their weary work through the foe's flesh?
That 's the wolf-nature. Don't mistake my trope!
A Cardinal so qualmish? Eminence,
My fight is figurative, blows i' the air,
Brain-war with powers and principalities,
Spirit-bravado, no real fisticuffs!

I shall not presently, when the knock comes,
Cling to this bench nor claw the hangman's face,
No, trust me! I conceive worse lots than mine.
Whether it be, the old contagious fit
And plague o' the prison have surprised me too,
The appropriate drunkenness of the death-hour
Crept on my sense, kind work o' the wine and myrrh, —
I know not, — I begin to taste my strength,
Careless, gay even. What's the worth of life?
The Pope's dead now, my murderous old man,
For Tozzi told me so: and you, forsooth —
Why, you don't think, Abate, do your best,
You'll live a year more with that hacking cough
And blotch of crimson where the cheek's a pit?
Tozzi has got you also down in book!
Cardinal, only seventh of seventy near,
Is not one called Albano in the lot?
Go eat your heart, you'll never be a Pope!
Inform me, is it true you left your love,
A Pucci, for promotion in the church?
She's more than in the church — in the churchyard!
Plautilla Pucci, your affianced bride,
Has dust now in the eyes that held the love, —
And Martinez, suppose they make you Pope,
Stops that with *veto*, — so, enjoy yourself!
I see you all reel to the rock, you waves —
Some forthright, some describe a sinuous track,
Some, crested brilliantly, with heads above,
Some in a strangled swirl sunk who knows how,
But all bound whither the main-current sets,
Rockward, an end in foam for all of you!
What if I be o'ertaken, pushed to the front
By all you crowding smoother souls behind,
And reach, a minute sooner than was meant,
The boundary whereon I break to mist?
Go to! the smoothest safest of you all,
Most perfect and compact wave in my train,
Spite of the blue tranquillity above,
Spite of the breadth before of lapsing peace,
Where broods the halcyon and the fish leaps free,
Will presently begin to feel the prick
At lazy heart, the push at torpid brain,
Will rock vertiginously in turn, and reel,
And, emulative, rush to death like me.
Later or sooner by a minute then,
So much for the untimeliness of death!

And, as regards the manner that offends,
The rude and rough, I count the same for gain.
Be the act harsh and quick! Undoubtedly
The soul 's condensed and, twice itself, expands
To burst through life, by alternation due,
Into the other state whate'er it prove.
You never know what life means till you die:
Even throughout life, 't is death that makes life live,
Gives it whatever the significance.
For see, on your own ground and argument,
Suppose life had no death to fear, how find
A possibility of nobleness
In man, prevented daring any more?
What 's love, what 's faith without a worst to dread?
Lack-lustre jewelry! but faith and love
With death behind them bidding do or die —
Put such a foil at back, the sparkle 's born!
From out myself how the strange colors come!
Is there a new rule in another world?
Be sure I shall resign myself: as here
I recognized no law I could not see,
There, what I see, I shall acknowledge too:
On earth I never took the Pope for God,
In heaven I shall scarce take God for the Pope.
Unmanned, remanned: I hold it probable —
With something changeless at the heart of me
To know me by, some nucleus that 's myself:
Accretions did it wrong? Away with them —
You soon shall see the use of fire!

Till when,
All that was, is; and must forever be.
Nor is it in me to unhate my hates, —
I use up my last strength to strike once more
Old Pietro in the wine-house-gossip-face,
To trample underfoot the whine and wile
Of beast Violante, — and I grow one gorge
To loathingly reject Pompilia's pale
Poison my hasty hunger took for food.
A strong tree wants no wreaths about its trunk,
No cloying cups, no sickly sweet of scent,
But sustenance at root, a bucketful.
How else lived that Athenian who died so,
Drinking hot bull's blood, fit for men like me?
I lived and died a man, and take man's chance,
Honest and bold: right will be done to such.

Who are these you have let descend my stair?
Ha, their accursed psalm! Lights at the sill!
Is it "Open" they dare bid you? Treachery!
Sirs, have I spoken one word all this while
Out of the world of words I had to say?
Not one word! All was folly — I laughed and mocked!
Sirs, my first true word, all truth and no lie,
Is — save me notwithstanding! Life is all!
I was just stark mad, — let the madman live
Pressed by as many chains as you please pile!
Don't open! Hold me from them! I am yours,
I am the Granduke's — no, I am the Pope's!
Abate, — Cardinal, — Christ, — Maria, — God, . . .
Pompilia, will you let them murder me?

XII.

THE BOOK AND THE RING.

Here were the end, had anything an end:
Thus, lit and launched, up and up roared and soared
A rocket, till the key o' the vault was reached,
And wide heaven held, a breathless minute-space,
In brilliant usurpature: thus caught spark,
Rushed to the height, and hung at full of fame
Over men's upturned faces, ghastly thence,
Our glaring Guido: now decline must be.
In its explosion, you have seen his act,
By my power — maybe, judged it by your own, —
Or composite as good orbs prove, or crammed
With worse ingredients than the Wormwood Star.
The act, over and ended, falls and fades:
What was once seen, grows what is now described,
Then talked of, told about, a tinge the less
In every fresh transmission; till it melts,
Trickles in silent orange or wan gray
Across our memory, dies and leaves all dark,
And presently we find the stars again.
Follow the main streaks, meditate the mode
Of brightness, how it hastes to blend with black!

After that February Twenty-Two,
Since our salvation, Sixteen-Ninety-Eight,
Of all reports that were, or may have been,
Concerning those the day killed or let live,
Four I count only. Take the first that comes.
A letter from a stranger, man of rank,
Venetian visitor at Rome, — who knows,
On what pretence of busy idleness?
Thus he begins on evening of that day.

"Here are we at our end of Carnival;
Prodigious gayety and monstrous mirth,
And constant shift of entertaining show:

With influx, from each quarter of the globe,
Of strangers nowise wishful to be last
I' the struggle for a good place presently
When that befalls, fate cannot long defer.
The old Pope totters on the verge o' the grave:
You see, Malpichi understood far more
Than Tozzi how to treat the ailments: age,
No question, renders these inveterate.
Cardinal Spada, actual Minister,
Is possible Pope; I wager on his head,
Since those four entertainments of his niece
Which set all Rome a-stare: Pope probably —
Though Colloredo has his backers too,
And San Cesario makes one doubt at times:
Altieri will be Chamberlain at most.

. . . .

"A week ago the sun was warm like May,
And the old man took daily exercise
Along the riverside; he loves to see
That Custom-house he built upon the bank,
For, Naples-born, his tastes are maritime:
But yesterday he had to keep in-doors
Because of the outrageous rain that fell.
On such days the good soul has fainting-fits,
Or lies in stupor, scarcely makes believe
Of minding business, fumbles at his beads.
They say, the trust that keeps his heart alive
Is that, by lasting till December next,
He may hold Jubilee a second time,
And, twice in one reign, ope the Holy Doors.
By the way, somebody responsible
Assures me that the King of France has writ
Fresh orders: Fénelon will be condemned:
The Cardinal makes a wry face enough,
Having a love for the delinquent: still,
He 's the ambassador, must press the point.
Have you a wager too, dependent here?

"Now, from such matters to divert awhile,
Hear of to-day's event which crowns the week,
Casts all the other wagers into shade.
Tell Dandolo I owe him fifty drops
Of heart's blood in the shape of gold zecchines!
The Pope has done his worst: I have to pay
For the execution of the Count, by Jove!
Two days since, I reported him as safe,

Re-echoing the conviction of all Rome:
Who could suspect its one deaf ear — the Pope's?
But prejudices grow insuperable,
And that old enmity to Austria, that
Passion for France and France's pageant-king
(Of which, why pause to multiply the proofs
Now scandalously rife in Europe's mouth?)
These fairly got the better in our man
Of justice, prudence, and *esprit de corps*,
And he persisted in the butchery.
Also, 't is said that in his latest walk
To that Dogana-by-the-Bank he built,
The crowd, — he suffers question, unrebuked, —
Asked, 'Whether murder was a privilege
Only reserved for nobles like the Count?'
And he was ever mindful of the mob.
Martinez, the Cæsarean Minister,
— Who used his best endeavors to spare blood,
And strongly pleaded for the life 'of one,'
Urged he, 'I may have dined at table with!' —
He will not soon forget the Pope's rebuff,
— Feels the slight sensibly, I promise you!
And but for the dissuasion of two eyes
That make with him foul weather or fine day,
He had abstained, nor graced the spectacle:
As it was, barely would he condescend
Look forth from the *palchetto* where he sat
Under the Pincian: we shall hear of this!
The substituting, too, the People's Square
For the out-o'-the-way old quarter by the Bridge,
Was meant as a conciliatory sop
To the mob; it gave one holiday the more.
But the French Embassy might unfurl flag, —
Still the good luck of France to fling a foe!
Cardinal Bouillon triumphs properly!
Palchetti were erected in the Place,
And houses, at the edge of the Three Streets,
Let their front windows at six dollars each:
Anguisciola, that patron of the arts,
Hired one; our Envoy Contarini too.

"Now for the thing; no sooner the decree
Gone forth, — 't is four-and-twenty hours ago, —
Than Acciaiuoli and Panciatichi,
Old friends, indeed compatriots of the man,
Being pitched on as the couple properest

To intimate the sentence yesternight,
Were closeted ere cock-crow with the Count.
They both report their efforts to dispose
The unhappy nobleman for ending well,
Despite the natural sense of injury,
Were crowned at last with a complete success.
And when the Company of Death arrived
At twenty-hours, — the way they reckon here, —
We say, at sunset, after dinner-time, —
The Count was led down, hoisted up on car,
Last of the five, as heinousest, you know:
Yet they allowed one whole car to each man.
His intrepidity, nay, nonchalance,
As up he stood and down he sat himself,
Struck admiration into those who saw.
Then the procession started, took the way
From the New Prisons by the Pilgrim's Street,
The street of the Governo, Pasquin's Street,
(Where was stuck up, 'mid other epigrams,
A quatrain . . . but of all that, presently!)
The Place Navona, the Pantheon's Place,
Place of the Column, last the Corso's length,
And so debouched thence at Mannaia's foot
I' the Place o' the People. As is evident,
(Despite the malice, — plainly meant, I fear,
By this abrupt change of locality, —
The Square 's no such bad place to head and hang)
We had the titillation as we sat
Assembled, (quality in conclave, ha?)
Of, minute after minute, some report
How the slow show was winding on its way.
Now did a car run over, kill a man,
Just opposite a pork-shop numbered Twelve:
And bitter were the outcries of the mob
Against the Pope: for, but that he forbids
The Lottery, why, Twelve were Tern Quatern!
Now did a beggar by Saint Agnes, lame
From his youth up, recover use of leg,
Through prayer of Guido as he glanced that way:
So that the crowd near crammed his hat with coin.
Thus was kept up excitement to the last,
— Not an abrupt out-bolting, as of yore,
From Castle, over Bridge and on to block,
And so all ended ere you well could wink!

"To mount the scaffold-steps, Guido was last
Here also, as atrociousest in crime.

We hardly noticed how the peasants died,
They dangled somehow soon to right and left,
And we remained all ears and eyes, could give
Ourselves to Guido undividedly,
As he harangued the multitude beneath.
He begged forgiveness on the part of God,
And fair construction of his act from men,
Whose suffrage he entreated for his soul,
Suggesting that we should forthwith repeat
A *Pater* and an *Ave*, with the hymn
Salve Regina Cœli, for his sake.
Which said, he turned to the confessor, crossed
And reconciled himself, with decency,
Oft glancing at Saint Mary's opposite,
Where they possess, and showed in shrine to-day,
The Blessed *Umbilicus* of our Lord,
(A relic 't is believed no other church
In Rome can boast of) — then rose up, as brisk
Knelt down again, bent head, adapted neck,
And, with the name of Jesus on his lips,
Received the fatal blow.

"The headsman showed
The head to the populace. Must I avouch
We strangers own to disappointment here?
Report pronounced him fully six feet high,
Youngish, considering his fifty years,
And, if not handsome, dignified at least.
Indeed, it was no face to please a wife!
His friends say, this was caused by the costume:
He wore the dress he did the murder in,
That is, a *just-a-corps* of russet serge,
Black camisole, coarse cloak of baracan
(So they style here the garb of goat's-hair cloth),
White hat and cotton cap beneath, poor Count,
Preservative against the evening dews
During the journey from Arezzo. Well,
So died the man, and so his end was peace;
Whence many a moral were to meditate.
Spada — you may bet Dandolo — is Pope!
Now for the quatrain!"

No, friend, this will do!
You 've sputtered into sparks. What streak comes next?
A letter: Don Giacinto Arcangeli,

Doctor and Proctor, him I made you mark
Buckle to business in his study late,
The virtuous sire, the valiant for the truth,
Acquaints his correspondent, — Florentine,
By name Cencini, advocate as well,
Socius and brother-in-the-devil to match, —
A friend of Franceschini, anyhow,
And knit up with the bowels of the case, —
Acquaints him (in this paper that I touch)
How their joint effort to obtain reprieve
For Guido had so nearly nicked the nine
And ninety and one over, — folk would say,
At Tarocs, — or succeeded, — in our phrase.
To this Cencini's care I owe the Book,
The yellow thing I take and toss once more, —
How will it be, my four-years'-intimate,
When thou and I part company anon? —
'T was he, the "whole position of the case,"
Pleading and summary, were put before;
Discreetly in my Book he bound them all,
Adding some three epistles to the point.
Here is the first of these, part fresh as penned,
The sand, that dried the ink, not rubbed away,
Though penned the day whereof it tells the deed:
Part — extant just as plainly, you know where,
Whence came the other stuff, went, you know how,
To make the Ring that 's all but round and done.

"Late they arrived, too late, egregious Sir,
Those same justificative points you urge
Might benefit His Blessed Memory
Count Guido Franceschini now with God:
Since the Court, — to state things succinctly, — styled
The Congregation of the Governor,
Having resolved on Tuesday last our cause
I' the guilty sense, with death for punishment,
Spite of all pleas by me deducible
In favor of said Blessed Memory, —
I, with expenditure cf pains enough,
Obtained a respite, leave to claim and prove
Exemption from the law's award, — alleged
The power and privilege o' the Clericate:
To which effect a courier was dispatched.
But ere an answer from Arezzo came,
The Holiness of our Lord the Pope (prepare!)

Judging it inexpedient to postpone
The execution of such sentence passed,
Saw fit, by his particular chirograph,
To derogate, dispense with privilege,
And wink at any hurt accruing thence
To Mother Church through damage of her son:
Also, to overpass and set aside
That other plea on score of tender age,
Put forth by me to do Pasquini good,
One of the four in trouble with our friend.
So that all five, to-day, have suffered death
With no distinction save in dying, — he,
Decollate by mere due of privilege,
The rest hanged decently and in order. Thus
Came the Count to his end of gallant man,
Defunct in faith and exemplarity:
Nor shall the shield of his great House lose shine
Thereby, nor its blue banner blush to red.
This, too, should yield sustainment to our hearts —
He had commiseration and respect
In his decease from universal Rome,
Quantum est hominum venustiorum,
The nice and cultivated everywhere:
Though, in respect of me his advocate,
Needs must I groan o'er my debility,
Attribute the untoward event o' the strife
To nothing but my own crass ignorance
Which failed to set the valid reasons forth,
Find fit excuse: such is the fate of war!
May God compensate us the direful blow
By future blessings on his family
Whereof I lowly beg the next commands;
— Whereto, as humbly, I confirm myself" . . .

And so forth, — follow name and place and date.
On next leaf —
"*Hactenus senioribus!*
There, old fox, show the clients t' other side
And keep this corner sacred, I beseech!
You and your pleas and proofs were what folk call
Pisan assistance, aid that comes too late,
Saves a man dead as nail in post of door.
Had I but time and space for narrative!
What was the good of twenty Clericates
When Somebody's thick headpiece once was bent
On seeing Guido's drop into the bag?

How these old men like giving youth a push!
So much the better: next push goes to him,
And a new Pope begins the century.
Much good I get by my superb defence!
But argument is solid and subsists,
While obstinacy and ineptitude
Accompany the owner to his tomb;
What do I care how soon? Beside, folks see!
Rome will have relished heartily the show,
Yet understood the motives, never fear,
Which caused the indecent change o' the People's Place
To the People's Playground, — stigmatize the spite
Which in a trice precipitated things!
As oft the moribund will give a kick
To show they are not absolutely dead,
So feebleness i' the socket shoots its last,
A spirt of violence for energy!

"But thou, Cencini, brother of my breast,
O fox, whose home is 'mid the tender grape,
Whose couch in Tuscany by Themis' throne,
Subject to no such . . . best I shut my mouth
Or only open it again to say,
This pother and confusion fairly laid,
My hands are empty and my satchel lank.
Now then for both the Matrimonial Cause
And the case of Gomez! Serve them hot and hot!

"*Reliqua differamus in crastinum!*
The impatient estafette cracks whip outside:
Still, though the earth should swallow him who swears
And me who make the mischief, in must slip —
My boy, your godson, fat-chaps Hyacinth,
Enjoyed the sight while Papa plodded here.
I promised him, the rogue, a month ago,
The day his birthday was, of all the days,
That if I failed to save Count Guido's head,
Cinuccio should at least go see it chopped
From trunk — 'So, latinize your thanks!' quoth I,
'That I prefer, *hoc malim*,' raps me out
The rogue: you notice the subjunctive? Ah!
Accordingly he sat there, bold in box,
Proud as the Pope behind the peacock-fans:
Whereon a certain lady-patroness
For whom I manage things (my boy in front,
Her Marquis sat the third in evidence;

Boys have no eyes nor ears save for the show)
'This time, Cintino,' was her sportive word,
When whiz and thump went axe and mowed lay man,
And folk could fall to the suspended chat,
'This time, you see, Bottini rules the roast,
Nor can Papa with all his eloquence
Be reckoned on to help as heretofore!'
Whereat Cinone pouts; then, sparkishly —
'Papa knew better than aggrieve his Pope,
And balk him of his grudge against our Count,
Else he'd have argued-off Bottini's' . . . what?
'His nose,' — the rogue! well parried of the boy!
He's long since out of Cæsar (eight years old)
And as for tripping in Eutropius . . . well,
Reason the more that we strain every nerve
To do him justice, mould a model-mouth,
A Bartolus-cum-Baldo for next age:
For that I purse the pieces, work the brain,
And want both Gomez and the marriage-case,
Success with which shall plaster aught of pate
That's broken in me by Bottini's flail,
And bruise his own, belike, that wags and brags.
Adverti supplico humiliter
Quod, don't the fungus see, the fop divine
That one hand drives two horses, left and right?
With this rein did I rescue from the ditch
The fortune of our Franceschini, keep
Unsplashed the credit of a noble House,
And set the fashionable cause at Rome
A-prancing till bystanders shouted ''ware!'
The other rein's judicious management
Suffered old Somebody to keep the pace,
Hobblingly play the roadster: who but he
Had his opinion, was not led by the nose
In leash of quibbles strung to look like law!
You'll soon see, — when I go to pay devoir
And compliment him on confuting me, —
If, by a back-swing of the pendulum,
Grace be not, thick and threefold, consequent.
'I must decide as I see proper, Don!
I'm Pope, I have my inward lights for guide.
Had learning been the matter in dispute,
Could eloquence avail to gainsay fact,
Yours were the victory, be comforted!'
Cinuzzo will be gainer by it all.
Quick then with Gomez, hot and hot next case!"

Follows, a letter, takes the other side.
Tall blue-eyed Fisc whose head is capped with cloud,
Doctor Bottini, — to no matter who,
Writes on the Monday two days afterward.
Now shall the honest championship of right,
Crowned with success, enjoy at last, unblamed,
Moderate triumph! Now shall eloquence
Poured forth in fancied floods for virtue's sake,
(The print is sorrowfully dyked and dammed,
But shows where fain the unbridled force would flow,
Finding a channel) — now shall this refresh
The thirsty donor with a drop or two!
Here has been truth at issue with a lie:
Let who gained truth the day have handsome pride
In his own prowess! Eh? What ails the man?

"Well, it is over, ends as I foresaw:
Easily proved, Pompilia's innocence!
Catch them entrusting Guido's guilt to me
Who had as usual, the plain truth to plead.
I always knew the clearness of the stream
Would show the fish so thoroughly, child might prong
The clumsy monster: with no mud to splash,
Small credit to lynx-eye and lightning-spear!
This Guido, — (much sport he contrived to make,
Who at first twist, preamble of the cord,
Turned white, told all, like the poltroon he was!) —
Finished, as you expect, a penitent,
Fully confessed his crime, and made amends,
And, edifying Rome last Saturday,
Died like a saint, poor devil! That's the man
The gods still give to my antagonist:
Imagine how Arcangeli claps wing
And crows! 'Such formidable facts to face,
So naked to attack, my client here,
And yet I kept a month the Fisc at bay,
And in the end had foiled him of the prize
By this arch-stroke, this plea of privilege,
But that the Pope must gratify his whim,
Put in his word, poor old man, — let it pass!'
— Such is the cue to which all Rome responds.
What with the plain truth given me to uphold,
And, should I let truth slip, the Pope at hand
To pick up, steady her on legs again,
My office turns a pleasantry indeed!

Not that the burly boaster did one jot
O' the little was to do — young Spreti's work!
But for him, — manikin and dandiprat,
Mere candle-end and inch of cleverness
Stuck on Arcangeli's save-all, — but for him
The spruce young Spreti, what is bad were worse!

"I looked that Rome should have the natural gird
At advocate with case that proves itself;
I knew Arcangeli would grin and brag:
But what say you to one impertinence
Might move a stone? That monk, you are to know,
That barefoot Augustinian whose report
O' the dying woman's words did detriment
To my best points it took the freshness from,
— That meddler preached to purpose yesterday
At San Lorenzo as a winding-up
O' the show which proved a treasure to the church.
Out comes his sermon smoking from the press:
Its text — 'Let God be true, and every man
A liar' — and its application, this,
The longest-winded of the paragraphs,
I straight unstitch, tear out and treat you with:
'T is piping hot and posts through Rome to-day.
Remember it, as I engage to do!

"But if you rather be disposed to see
In the result of the long trial here, —
This dealing doom to guilt and doling praise
To innocency, — any proof that truth
May look for vindication from the world,
Much will you have misread the signs, I say.
God, who seems acquiescent in the main
With those who add 'So will he ever sleep' —
Flutters their foolishness from time to time,
Puts forth his right-hand recognizably;
Even as, to fools who deem he needs must right
Wrong on the instant, as if earth were heaven,
He wakes remonstrance — 'Passive, Lord, how long?
Because Pompilia's purity prevails,
Conclude you, all truth triumphs in the end?
So might those old inhabitants of the ark,
Witnessing haply their dove's safe return,
Pronounce there was no danger, all the while
O' the deluge, to the creature's counterparts,

Aught that beat wing i' the world, was white or soft, —
And that the lark, the thrush, the culver too,
Might equally have traversed air, found earth,
And brought back olive-branch in unharmed bill.
Methinks I hear the Patriarch's warning voice —
'Though this one breast, by miracle, return,
No wave rolls by, in all the waste, but bears
Within it some dead dove-like thing as dear,
Beauty made blank and harmlessness destroyed!'
How many chaste and noble sister-fames
Wanted the extricating hand, so lie
Strangled, for one Pompilia proud above
The welter, plucked from the world's calumny,
Stupidity, simplicity, — who cares?

"Romans! An elder race possessed your land
Long ago, and a false faith lingered still,
As shades do, though the morning-star be out.
Doubtless some pagan of the twilight-day
Has often pointed to a cavern-mouth,
Obnoxious to beholders, hard by Rome,
And said, — nor he a bad man, no, nor fool, —
Only a man born blind like all his mates, —
'Here skulk in safety, lurk, defying law,
The devotees to execrable creed,
Adoring — with what culture . . . Jove, avert
Thy vengeance from us worshippers of thee! . . .
What rites obscene — their idol-god an Ass!'
So went the word forth, so acceptance found,
So century re-echoed century,
Cursed the accursed, — and so, from sire to son,
You Romans cried, 'The offscourings of our race,
Corrupt within the depths there: fitly fiends
Perform a temple-service o'er the dead:
Child, gather garment round thee, pass nor pry!'
Thus groaned your generations: till the time
Grew ripe, and lightning had revealed, belike, —
Through crevice peeped into by curious fear, —
Some object even fear could recognize
I' the place of spectres; on the illumined wall,
To wit, some nook, tradition talks about,
Narrow and short, a corpse's length, no more:
And by it, in the due receptacle,
The little rude brown lamp of earthenware,
The cruse, was meant for flowers, but now held blood,
The rough-scratched palm-branch, and the legend left

Pro Christo. Then the mystery lay clear:
The abhorred one was a martyr all the time,
Heaven's saint whereof earth was not worthy. What?
Do you continue in the old belief?
Where blackness bides unbroke, must devils brood?
Is it so certain not another cell
O' the myriad that make up the catacomb,
Contains some saint a second flash would show?
Will you ascend into the light of day
And, having recognized a martyr's shrine,
Go join the votaries that gape around
Each vulgar god that awes the market-place?
Are these the objects of your praising? See!
In the outstretched right hand of Apollo, there,
Lies screened a scorpion: housed amid the folds
Of Juno's mantle lurks a centipede!
Each statue of a god were fitlier styled
Demon and devil. Glorify no brass
That shines like burnished gold in noonday glare,
For fools! Be otherwise instructed, you!
And preferably ponder, ere ye judge,
Each incident of this strange human play
Privily acted on a theatre,
That seemed secure from every gaze but God's, —
Till, of a sudden, earthquake laid wall low
And let the world perceive wild work inside,
And how, in petrifaction of surprise,
The actors stood, — raised arm and planted foot, —
Mouth as it made, eye as it evidenced,
Despairing shriek, triumphant hate, — transfixed,
Both he who takes and she who yields the life.

"As ye become spectators of this scene —
Watch obscuration of a pearl-pure fame
By vapory films, enwoven circumstance,
— A soul made weak by its pathetic want
Of just the first apprenticeship to sin,
Which thenceforth makes the sinning soul secure
From all foes save itself, soul's truliest foe, —
Since egg turned snake needs fear no serpentry, —
As ye behold this web of circumstance
Deepen the more for every thrill and throe,
Convulsive effort to disperse the films
And disenmesh the fame o' the martyr, — mark
How all those means, the unfriended one pursues,
To keep the treasure trusted to her breast,

Each struggle in the flight from death to life,
How all, by procuration of the powers
Of darkness, are transformed, — no single ray,
Shot forth to show and save the inmost star,
But, passed as through hell's prism, proceeding black
To the world that hates white: as ye watch, I say,
Till dusk and such defacement grow eclipse
By — marvellous perversity of man! —
The inadequacy and inaptitude
Of that selfsame machine, that very law
Man vaunts, devised to dissipate the gloom,
Rescue the drowning orb from calumny,
— Hear law, appointed to defend the just,
Submit, for best defence, that wickedness
Was bred of flesh and innate with the bone
Borne by Pompilia's spirit for a space,
And no mere chance fault, passionate and brief:
Finally, when ye find, — after this touch
Of man's protection which intends to mar
The last pin-point of light and damn the disc, —
One wave of the hand of God amid the worlds
Bid vapor vanish, darkness flee away,
And let the vexed star culminate in peace
Approachable no more by earthly mist —
What I call God's hand, — you, perhaps, — mere chance
Of the true instinct of an old good man
Who happens to hate darkness and love light, —
In whom too was the eye that saw, not dim,
The natural force to do the thing he saw,
Nowise abated, — both by miracle, —
All this well pondered, — I demand assent
To the enunciation of my text
In face of one proof more that 'God is true
And every man a liar' — that who trusts
To human testimony for a fact
Gets this sole fact — himself is proved a fool;
Man's speech being false, if but by consequence
That only strength is true! while man is weak,
And, since truth seems reserved for heaven not earth,
Plagued here by earth's prerogative of lies,
Should learn to love and long for what, one day,
Approved by life's probation, he may speak.

"For me, the weary and worn, who haply prompt
To mirth or pity, as I move the mood, —
A friar who glides unnoticed to the grave,

With these bare feet, coarse robe and rope-girt waist, —
I have long since renounced your world, ye know:
Yet what forbids I weigh the prize foregone,
The worldly worth? I dare, as I were dead,
Disinterestedly judge this and that
Good ye account good: but God tries the heart.
Still, if you question me of my content
At having put each human pleasure by,
I answer, at the urgency of truth:
As this world seems, I dare not say I know
— Apart from Christ's assurance which decides —
Whether I have not failed to taste much joy.
For many a doubt will fain perturb my choice —
Many a dream of life spent otherwise —
How human love, in varied shapes, might work
As glory, or as rapture, or as grace:
How conversancy with the books that teach,
The arts that help, — how, to grow good and great,
Rather than simply good, and bring thereby
Goodness to breathe and live, nor, born i' the brain,
Die there, — how these and many another gift
Of life are precious though abjured by me.
But, for one prize, best meed of mightiest man,
Arch-object of ambition, — earthly praise,
Repute o' the world, the flourish of loud trump,
The softer social fluting, — Oh, for these,
— No, my friends! Fame, — that bubble which, world-wide
Each blows and bids his neighbor lend a breath,
That so he haply may behold thereon
One more enlarged distorted false fool's-face,
Until some glassy nothing grown as big
Send by a touch the imperishable to suds, —
No, in renouncing fame, my loss was light,
Choosing obscurity, my chance was well!"

Didst ever touch such ampollosity
As the monk's own bubble, let alone its spite?
What 's his speech for, but just the fame he flouts?
How he dares reprehend both high and low,
Nor stoops to turn the sentence "God is true
And every man a liar — save the Pope
Happily reigning — my respects to him!"
And so round off the period. Molinism
Simple and pure! To what pitch get we next?
I find that, for first pleasant consequence,

Gomez, who had intended to appeal
From the absurd decision of the Court,
Declines, though plain enough his privilege,
To call on help from lawyers any more —
Resolves earth's liars may possess the world,
Till God have had sufficiency of both:
So may I whistle for my job and fee!

But, for this virulent and rabid monk, —
If law be an inadequate machine,
And advocacy, froth and impotence,
We shall soon see, my blatant brother! That 's
Exactly what I hope to show your sort!
For, by a veritable piece of luck,
The providence, you monks round period with,
All may be gloriously retrieved. Perpend!
That Monastery of the Convertites
Whereto the Court consigned Pompilia first,
— Observe, if convertite, why, sinner then,
Or what 's the pertinency of award? —
And whither she was late returned to die,
— Still in their jurisdiction, mark again! —
That thrifty Sisterhood, for perquisite,
Claims every piece whereof may die possessed
Each sinner in the circuit of its walls.
Now, this Pompilia seeing that, by death
O' the couple, all their wealth devolved on her,
Straight utilized the respite ere decease,
By regular conveyance of the goods
She thought her own, to will and to devise, —
Gave all to friends, Tighetti and the like,
In trust for him she held her son and heir,
Gaetano, — trust which ends with infancy:
So willing and devising, since assured
The justice of the Court would presently
Confirm her in her rights and exculpate,
Re-integrate and rehabilitate —
Place her as, through my pleading, now she stands.
But here 's the capital mistake: the Court
Found Guido guilty, — but pronounced no word
About the innocency of his wife:
I grounded charge on broader base, I hope!
No matter whether wife be true or false,
The husband must not push aside the law,
And punish of a sudden: that 's the point:
Gather from out my speech the contrary!

It follows that Pompilia, unrelieved
By formal sentence from imputed fault,
Remains unfit to have and to dispose
Of property which law provides shall lapse:
Wherefore the Monastery claims its due.
And whose, pray, whose the office, but the Fisc's?
Who but I institute procedure next
Against the person of dishonest life,
Pompilia, whom last week I sainted so?
I it is teach the monk what scripture means,
And that the tongue should prove a two-edged sword,
No axe sharp one side, blunt the other way,
Like what amused the town at Guido's cost!
Astræa redux! I 've a second chance
Before the selfsame Court o' the Governor
Who soon shall see volte-face and chop, change sides.
Accordingly, I charge you on your life,
Send me with all dispatch the judgment late
O' the Florence Rota Court, confirmative
O' the prior judgment at Arezzo, clenched
Again by the Granducal signature,
Wherein Pompilia is convicted, doomed,
And only destined to escape through flight
The proper punishment. Send me the piece, —
I 'll work it! And this foul-mouthed friar shall find
His Noah's-dove that brought the olive back
Turn into quite the other sooty scout,
The raven, Noah first put forth the ark,
Which never came back, but ate carcasses!
No adequate machinery in law?
No power of life and death i' the learned tongue?
Methinks I am already at my speech,
Startle the world with "Thou, Pompilia, thus?
How is the fine gold of the Temple dim!"
And so forth. But the courier bids me close,
And clip away one joke that runs through Rome,
Side by side with the sermon which I send.
How like the heartlessness of the old hunks
Arcangeli! His Count is hardly cold,
The client whom his blunders sacrificed,
When somebody must needs describe the scene —
How the procession ended at the church
That boasts the famous relic: quoth our brute,
"Why, that 's just Martial's phrase for 'make an end' —
Ad umbilicum sic perventum est!"
The callous dog, — let who will cut off head,

He cuts a joke, and cares no more than so!
I think my speech shall modify his mirth:
"How is the fine gold dim!" — but send the piece!

Alack, Bottini, what is my next word
But death to all that hope? The Instrument
Is plain before me, print that ends my Book
With the definitive verdict of the Court,
Dated September, six months afterward,
(Such trouble and so long the old Pope gave!)
"In restitution of the perfect fame
Of dead Pompilia, *quondam* Guido's wife,
And warrant to her representative
Domenico Tighetti, barred hereby,
While doing duty in his guardianship,
From all molesting, all disquietude,
Each perturbation and vexation brought
Or threatened to be brought against the heir
By the Most Venerable Convent called
Saint Mary Magdalen o' the Convertites
I' the Corso."
Justice done a second time!
Well judged, Marc Antony, *Locum-tenens*
O' the Governor, a Venturini too!
For which I save thy name, — last of the list!

Next year but one, completing his nine years
Of rule in Rome, died Innocent my Pope
— By some account, on his accession-day.
If he thought doubt would do the next age good,
'T is pity he died unapprised what birth
His reign may boast of, be remembered by —
Terrible Pope, too, of a kind, — Voltaire.

And so an end of all i' the story. Strain
Never so much my eyes, I miss the mark
If lived or died that Gaetano, child
Of Guido and Pompilia: only find,
Immediately upon his father's death,
A record, in the annals of the town —
That Porzia, sister of our Guido, moved
The Priors of Arezzo and their head
Its Gonfalonier to give loyally
A public attestation of the right
O' the Franceschini to all reverence —

Apparently because of the incident
O' the murder, — there 's no mention made o' the crime,
But what else could have caused such urgency
To cure the mob, just then, of greediness
For scandal, love of lying vanity,
And appetite to swallow crude reports
That bring annoyance to their betters? — bane
Which, here, was promptly met by antidote.
I like and shall translate the eloquence
Of nearly the worst Latin ever writ:
"Since antique time whereof the memory
Holds the beginning, to this present hour,
The Franceschini ever shone, and shine
Still i' the primary rank, supreme amid
The lustres of Arezzo, proud to own
In this great family, the flag-bearer,
Guide of her steps and guardian against foe, —
As in the first beginning, so to-day!"
There, would you disbelieve the annalist,
Go rather by the babble of a bard?
I thought, Arezzo, thou hadst fitter souls,
Petrarch, — nay, Buonarroti at a pinch,
To do thee credit as *vexillifer!*
Was it mere mirth the Patavinian meant,
Making thee out, in his veracious page,
Founded by Janus of the Double Face?

Well, proving of such perfect parentage,
Our Gaetano, born of love and hate,
Did the babe live or die? I fain would find!
What were his fancies if he grew a man?
Was he proud, — a true scion of the stock
Which bore the blazon, shall make bright my page —
Shield, Azure, on a Triple Mountain, Or,
A Palm-tree, Proper, whereunto is tied
A Grayhound, Rampant, striving in the slips?
Or did he love his mother, the base-born,
And fight i' the ranks, unnoticed by the world?

Such, then, the final state o' the story. So
Did the Star Wormwood in a blazing fall
Frighten awhile the waters and lie lost.
So did this old woe fade from memory:
Till after, in the fulness of the days,
I needs must find an ember yet unquenched,
And, breathing, blow the spark to flame. It lives,
If precious be the soul of man to man.

So, British Public, who may like me yet,
(Marry and amen!) learn one lesson hence
Of many which whatever lives should teach:
This lesson, that our human speech is nought,
Our human testimony false, our fame
And human estimation words and wind.
Why take the artistic way to prove so much?
Because, it is the glory and good of Art,
That Art remains the one way possible
Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine at least.
How look a brother in the face and say,
"Thy right is wrong, eyes hast thou yet art blind;
Thine ears are stuffed and stopped, despite their length:
And, oh, the foolishness thou countest faith!"
Say this as silverly as tongue can troll —
The anger of the man may be endured,
The shrug, the disappointed eyes of him
Are not so bad to bear — but here 's the plague
That all this trouble comes of telling truth,
Which truth, by when it reaches him, looks false,
Seems to be just the thing it would supplant,
Nor recognizable by whom it left:
While falsehood would have done the work of truth.
But Art, — wherein man nowise speaks to men,
Only to mankind, — Art may tell a truth
Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,
Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word.
So may you paint your picture, twice show truth,
Beyond mere imagery on the wall, —
So, note by note, bring music from your mind,
Deeper than ever e'en Beethoven dived, —
So write a book shall mean beyond the facts,
Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.

And save the soul! If this intent save mine, —
If the rough ore be rounded to a ring,
Render all duty which good ring should do,
And, failing grace, succeed in guardianship, —
Might mine but lie outside thine, Lyric Love,
Thy rare gold ring of verse (the poet praised)
Linking our England to his Italy!

So, British Public, who may like me yet,
(Marry and amen!) learn one lesson hence
Of many which whatever lives should teach:
This lesson, that our human speech is naught,
Our human testimony false, our fame
And human estimation words and wind.
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Might mine but lie outside thine, Lyric Love,
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NOTES.

The number of the page is given, followed immediately by the number of the line on the page. The word or passage which is interpreted is given in italics. All the passages on a page are put into one paragraph, but in case there is more than one the page number is not repeated and the number of the line is put in parenthesis.

1:1, *Ring;* such a ring was worn by Mrs. Browning; after her death Browning carried it on his watch-chain, and it is now in possession of their son. (2) *Castellani's imitative craft* was that of Fortunato Piso Castellani, who in 1826 established himself as a jeweler in Rome, and executed imitations of Etruscan, Greek, and Byzantine work. In his *Roba di Roma*, W. W. Story speaks of his "admirable reproductions of jewelry in the Etruscan and early Christian style, which have won for him so just a celebrity, and who exercises his profession in the true spirit of an antiquary and an artist." (6) *Chiusi*, ancient Clusium of Lars Porsenna, capital of Etruria. Near the modern city, after heavy rains, are found specimens of Etruscan jewelry in the *Campo degli Orefici*, Jewelers' Field. (22) *repristination*, restoring pristine character. (27) *rondure*, French *rond* = round, a circle.

2:13, *Baccio's marble*, by Baccio Bandinelli, a Florentine sculptor, 1497–1559. It is a statue of Giovanni delle Bande Nere, John of the Black Bands, father of Cosimo I., in one corner of the Borgo di San Lorenzo. Hare says that, "like most of the works of this conceited but indifferent master, it has been much ridiculed." (26) *breccia*, small pieces of stone from broken walls. (33) *scagliola*, marble or stone flooring. (34) *crazie*, somewhat less than two cents. (37) *the imaginative Sienese*, see line 24 on page 9. (40) *Lionard*, Lionardo da Vinci, whose picture called *Joconde* is in the Louvre gallery, a portrait of Mona Lisa Gioconda. (45) *Spicilegium*, a book of selections from the best authors. (46) *Frail one of the Flower*, *La Dame aux Camélias.*

3:25, *festas*, feast days. (4:45) *Fisc*, Public Prosecutor or Counsel for the Treasury.

6:10, *Solon*, as described by Plutarch, made very absurd laws about women, sometimes making the penalty of adultery death, in other cases heavy fines, and in others small fines. (11) *Romulus*, according to Plutarch, would not permit a wife to leave her husband, but allowed him to put her away for adultery and for counterfeiting his keys; *Justinian*, Emperor, whose Code summarized all Roman law. (12) *Baldo*, professor of civil and canon law, born 1327; *Bartolo*, jurist, 1313–1356, assisted Charles V. in codifying laws of Holy Roman Empire. (14) *Cornelia de Sicariis*, *Pompeia de Parricidiis*, laws of the early Roman Emperors relating to marriage and adultery.

(18) *Dolabella*, see page 299, line 35. (19) *Theodoric*, in his *Variæ Epistolæ*, written for him by Cassiodorus, says that brutes defend their conjugal rights by force, and that man is much more likely to do so because he feels more strongly the dishonor. (20) *Ælian*, instance contained in his *De Animalium Natura*, xi. 15.

7: 7, *presbyter, primæ tonsuræ, subdiaconus, sacerdos*, presbyter, first tonsure, subdeacon, priest, successive orders in Roman church; the first two, being those of first tonsure and subdeacon, are given to laymen, who can marry, and entitle them to appeal to the pope. (27) *Ghetto*, Jews' quarter in a city of the Middle Ages. (43) *Innocent*; The chief historical character in this poem is Innocent XII., who was pope from 1691 to his death, in September, 1700. Antonio Pignatelli was born at Naples in 1615, and was educated at the Jesuit College in Rome. At the age of twenty he entered the papal service, and rose step by step until he was a cardinal in 1681; and he was also the archbishop of Naples. When he became pope he opposed nepotism and simony, and he ruled with moderation and justice. He built the harbor of Prato d' Anzo on the ruins of ancient Antium, constructed an aqueduct for Civita Vecchia, and built the palace of Monte Citario for the courts of justice in Rome. He also erected many other buildings, including schools, asylums, and the penitentiary of San Michele. He made a law that no pope or cardinal should ever indulge in nepotism; but his main political act was that connected with a quarrel of the popes with Louis XIV. and the French church. Louis claimed the independence of the French church, and that he was its head, practically. To this assertion Innocent was strongly opposed, and the quarrel lasted throughout his reign. The *Encylopædia Britannica*, in its article on Innocent XI., says he is the Pope of Browning's poem; but in this it is in error, for the poem distinctly calls the Pope by his name, "Antonio Pignatelli of Naples." Some reference is made to Innocent XI., however, and especially in connection with the Molinists. Benedetto Odescalchi was born at Como in 1611, became a cardinal in 1647, and was elected pope in September, 1676. He had courage and firmness, but he was austere and obstinate. He reduced ecclesiastical abuses, and broke up nepotism. He was opposed by the Jesuits, but was very popular. Under him began the quarrel with Louis XIV. He claimed the revenues of vacant ecclesiastical offices in France, which Louis desired for himself. The quarrel was also waged with reference to the right of asylum of the foreign ambassadors in Rome, a right which Innocent refused to have continued. An account of this quarrel of diplomatists is to be found in the third volume of Ranke's *Ecclesiastical and Political History of the Popes of Rome.* Ranke says that "Innocent XI., of the house of Odescalchi of Como, came to Rome in his twenty-fifth year, with no other fortune than his sword and pistols, to seek some secular employment there, or perhaps to take service in the Neapolitan army. The advice of a cardinal, who saw more deeply into his character than he did himself, induced him to enter upon the career of the curia. This he did with so much zeal and earnestness, and gradually secured such a reputation for ability and good intentions, that while the conclave was sitting the people shouted his name under the porticoes of St. Peter's, and there was a general feeling of satisfaction when his

election was declared. He was a man of such mildness and humility of manner that when he called for any of his servants, it was with the reservation, 'if it was convenient to them;' of such purity of heart and life that his confessor declared that he never discovered in him anything which could sever the soul from God; meek and gentle, but impelled by the same conscientiousness which governed his private life to fulfill the duties of his office with inflexible integrity." This account of Innocent XI. agrees much better with the character attributed by Browning to his Pope than anything which is told of Innocent XII. It seems that the poet confounded the two men with each other, or, what is more probable, that he deliberately gave to Innocent XII. qualities which belonged only to Innocent XI.

8: 7, *Jansenists, re-nicknamed Molinists ;* Jansen was a Hollander, 1585–1638, who revived the spirit of the theology of St. Augustine. His teachings passed into France, and there gained the name of Jansenism about the middle of the sixteenth century. This was a liberal movement within the Catholic Church, based on the same spiritual principles as Protestantism, and for that reason opposed by the Jesuits, and finally condemned by the Church. The Jansenist movement found its noblest expression in Port Royal, the Arnaulds, Fénelon, and the *Provincial Letters* of Pascal. The Jansenist teachings were revived by Michel or Miguel de Molinos, 1627–1696, a Spaniard, who published in 1675 his *Il Guida Spirituale*, The Spiritual Guide. This book became very popular and was translated into many languages, appearing in English in 1699. Molinos had a genius for religious instruction, and the ability to make spiritual things real to those he influenced. His doctrine is often described as Quietism, and it is simply mysticism, or the belief that God communicates himself directly to the human soul. Molinos won many followers in Rome, among them Christine of Sweden and Innocent XI. The Roman church, however, has never been friendly to mysticism; Molinos was brought to trial, Innocent was driven to condemn him, but greatly against his will, and he was sentenced to perpetual silence. (19) *Nepotism*, Latin, *nepos* = nephew, custom of popes of bestowing positions and salaries on their sons, who were called their nephews for diplomatic reasons. (24) *carlines*, coin worth four cents.

9: 14, *obelisk*, brought from Egypt by Augustus and set up in Circus Maximus, but, having fallen, was removed to Piazza del Popolo in 1589 by Sixtus V. (38) *Canon*, member of order in Roman Church between monks and secular clergy, instituted in eighth century. Canons live and eat together, have stated prayers, but do not take vows. In eleventh century they were divided into regular and secular, the first becoming much like monks in renouncing private property.

10: 41, *Diario*, daily newspaper.

11: 9, *Manning, Newman, Wiseman*, English leaders in the Catholic Church, cardinals and archbishops. (23) *lingot*, French, same as ingot, a small mass of metal, here used for the solid mass of truth. (31) *djereed*, Arab spear.

12: 9, *gold snow ;* Jove covered island of Rhodes with golden cloud because the people first offered sacrifices to Minerva. (14) *datura*, stramonium, thorn-apple.

16: 11, *abacus*, upper part of capital of pillar upon which architrave rests. (37) *malleolable*, from Latin *malleolus*, little hammer.

20: 25, *Æacus*, judge of underworld with Minos and Rhadamanthus, here used as type of judicial fairness.

21: 8, *market-place of the Barberini ;* "Whoever has been in Rome," says Christian Andersen, "is well acquainted with the Piazza Barberini, in the great square, with the beautiful fountain where the Tritons empty the spouting conch-shell, from which the water springs upward many feet." (11) *Bernini's creature ;* Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini was born in Naples in 1598, went to Rome early, worked for the popes and cardinals as an architect and sculptor, spent some time in Paris, and died in 1680. He built the palace of the Barberini, and the fountain in front of it. (28) *tertium quid*, a third something.

22: 2, *girandole*, a dance. (23: 2) *Vigil-torture*, to keep a condemned man from sleep, invented by Marsiliis, jurist of Bologna, and called by him *cordis dolorem.*

26: 40, *levigate*, to make light.

28: 7, *rondo*, a form of iambic verse of thirteen lines and two rhymes, with three stanzas. (9) *from old Corelli to young Haendel ;* Arcangelo Corelli, 1653–1713, was a great violinist and composer. He lived in Rome, where he gained a great reputation as a performer. Herr Paul David says of his relations to Handel: "Handel conducted some of his own cantatas, which were written in a more complicated style than the music with which Corelli and the Italian musicians of that period were familiar. Handel tried in vain to explain to Corelli, who was leading the band, how a certain passage ought to be executed, and at last, losing his temper, snatched the violin from Corelli's hands and played it himself, whereupon Corelli remarked in the politest manner, 'But, my dear Saxon, this music is in the French style, of which I have no experience.' He had a European reputation and wrote much." (34) *lathen*, brass or bronze work used in Middle Ages for crosses and candlesticks.

29: 28, *rivelled*, shrank up. (33) *New Prison*, built by Innocent XI.

30: 15, *Brotherhood of Death*, Confraternity of the Misericordia or Brothers of Mercy, who attend funerals as an act of charity and prepare criminals for death. (32) *Mannaia*, guillotine.

32: 6, *O lyric Love ;* addressed to Mrs. Browning. First ten lines form a vocative with "O lyric Love." Lines seven to ten are adverb to *human;* fifteen to twenty-one, adverb to *commence ;* twenty-three to twenty-five, adverb to *raising ;* twenty-six, adverb to *raising ;* last two lines, objects of *blessing.* The grammatical construction is fully given in *Browning Guide-Book.* Browning wrote Mrs. Orr as follows on some of his grammatical usages: "I make use of 'wast' for the second person of the perfect indicative, and 'wert' for the present potential, simply to be understood; as I should hardly be if I substituted the latter for the former, and therewith ended my phrase. 'Where wert thou, brother, those three days, had He not raised thee?' means one thing, and 'Where wast thou when He did so?' means another. That there is precedent in plenty for this and many similar locutions ambiguous, or archaic, or vicious, I am well aware,

and that, on their authority, I *be* wrong, the illustrious poet *be* right, and you, our critic, *was* and shall continue to be my instructor as to 'everything that pretty *bin.*' As regards my objections to the slovenly 'I had' for 'I'd,' instead of the proper 'I would,' I shall not venture to supplement what Landor has magisterially spoken on the subject. An adverb adds to, and does not by its omission alter into nonsense, the verb it qualifies. 'I would rather speak than be silent, better criticise than learn,' are forms structurally regular: what meaning is in 'I had speak,' 'had criticise'? Then, I am blamed for preferring the indicative to what I suppose may be the potential mood in the case of 'need' and 'dare,'—just that unlucky couple; by all means go on and say 'He need help, he dare me to fight,' and so pair off with 'He need not beg, he dare not reply,' forms which may be expected to pullulate in this morning's paper."

33:6, *Lorenzo in Lucina*, church of Pompilia, in small square of San Lorenzo, founded in fifth century and rebuilt in 1606 by Paul V. (8) *Corso*, principal street of Rome, a mile long, with many palaces and shops.

35:2, *Guido Reni*, painter of Bolognese school, 1574–1642; his picture shows crucifixion with background of stormy sky. (33) *as the ancient sings*, Horace, *Satires*, i. 7, 3.

37:8, *Cardinal, who book-made;* Cardinal d'Estrees, who represented Louis XIV. at Papal court, was much in sympathy with Molinos, put him in correspondence with important people in France, and wrote in exposition of his views. (17) *Ruspoli*, palace on the Corso. (21) *handsel*, first gift. (23) *galliard*, active.

39:36, *dab-chick*, small grebe, genus of diving birds; swims gracefully, but awkward on land. (42) *tacked to Church's tail* refers to Guido's belonging to one of the first or secular orders in the succession to the priesthood.

42:39, *Quoth Solomon*, Solomon's Song iv. 9.

43:8, *Plutus*, God of Wealth. (40) *verjuice*, acid liquid made from crab-apples or unripe grapes.

44:9, *doited*, dotage, from *doit*, very small Dutch or Scotch coin, therefore meaning of small value. (11) *novercal*, pertaining to stepmother, from Latin *noverca*, stepmother. (34) *cater-cousin*, within four degrees; *sib*, kinship.

45:11, *Jubilee*, held once in twenty-five years.

46:12, *principal of the usufruct*, the amount of his life-tenure.

51:30, *Mum and budget*, Shakespeare, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, V. ii. 7.

54:39, *Osteria*, tavern or inn.

56:26, *sbirri*, papal police.

58:20, *repugns*, opposes. (34) *fardel*, bundle or package.

59:6, *apage*, away with thee. (45) *Convertites*, order of nuns devoted to rescue of fallen women, membership being drawn from this class.

60:22, *Ovid, a like sufferer*, who was banished to Tomis on Euxine by Augustus, for an amour. (45) *Pontifex Maximus whipped Vestals*, if they permitted sacred fire to go out.

61:7, *firk*, beat or punish. (26) *Canidian hate;* Horace loved and

praised Canidia in his poems, but when she deserted him he called her a witch.

63:8, *Domus pro carcere*, a house for a prison. (43) *the hoard i' the heart o' the toad*, see *As You Like It*, II. i. 15.

66:10, *Astræa*, virgin-goddess of justice, daughter of Zeus and Themis. (21) *male-Grissel*, Griselda is type of female patience in Chaucer's Clerk of Oxenford's tale. (29) *Rolando-stroke;* made by sword Durandal in hands of Roland, in saga about that hero. (30) *clavicle*, collar-bone.

69:1, *Saint Anna's*, monastery in Rome, where Vittoria Colonna awaited her death. (23) *Carlo Maratta*, celebrated Roman painter, 1625–1713, called Carlo delle Madonne, because of many pictures of Virgin painted by him.

70: 14, *Philosophic Sin;* Molinos held that pride and striving for the assertion of self constitute the chief sin. (36) *yon Triton's trump;* speaker is in Piazza Barberini, looking at Bernini's fountain in form of a Triton.

73: 19, *Eden tree*, the poet's own picture of the expulsion from Eden.

75: 34, *lured as larks;* a trap is used for catching larks that attracts them by pieces of glass fixed in the sun.

76: 8, *rutilant*, shining. (33) *the Hesperian ball*, golden apple Hercules brought from garden of Hesperides. (40) *the Square of Spain*, Piazza di Spagna, into which runs the Via del Babbuino; and the Fontana della Barcaccia, Boat-fountain, is in it.

77: 6, *cross*, money, from cross being stamped on it formerly; *poke*, pocket. (8) *imposthume*, abscess or collection of purulent matter. (44) *Danae;* in shower of gold Zeus introduced himself into room of Danae, and Perseus was born.

78: 38, *hinge;* Cardinal is from *cardo*, hinge; so called, says Trench, "as undoubtedly adhering more nearly to that hinge by which all things are moved."

79: 30, *orts*, scraps. (34) *quag*, bog or quagmire.

80: 27, *Holy Year;* instituted by Boniface VIII., who became pope in 1294, and is a time of special indulgences. (39) *great door;* in the holy or jubilee year, the pope goes in solemn procession to the Porta Aurea, or golden door of St. Peter's, knocks three times, and calls out in words of Psalm cxviii. 19, "Open to me the gates of righteousness." The doors are opened, he sprinkles them with holy water, and passes through. At the close of the jubilee they are walled up until the next Holy Year arrives. (44) *Penitentiary*, an ecclesiastical officer who deals with special cases of confession; when connected with a cathedral, can absolve from sin.

85: 40, *tenebrific*, causing darkness.

86: 45, *charactery*, process of expression by means of characters.

97: 41, *the purple*, color worn by Cardinals.

99: 33, *Civita*, Civita Vecchia, the seaport of Rome, near mouth of Tiber.

100: 21, *Hundred Merry Tales;* a collection by this name was published in England, in 1526, by John Rastell; but undoubtedly Browning had in mind the *Decameron* of Boccaccio, or more probably the novels of Franco Sacchetti. (25) *Vulcan's part*, *Odyssey*, viii. 266.

Vulcan or Hephæstus is deceived by Aphrodite and Ares as described.

106: 31, *Trecentos inseris*, etc., Horace, *Satires*, i. 5. 12, Ho, there! that is enough now, you are stowing in hundreds.

107: 6, *Eusebius*, one of the early historians of Christianity, 265–338. (18) *basset*, fashionable game of seventeenth century. (19) *Her Eminence*, poet follows an Italian idiom.

108: 7, *mudlarks*, rag-pickers and sewer-cleaners.

109: 10, *Fidei commissum*, tenure of the trust, Browning translates. Hereafter no translation will be made where the poet gives the meaning in his own free rendering. (22) *missal*, mass-book or prayer-book of the Roman Church, but is used in morning and not at vespers.

110: 13, *pauls*, old Italian coins worth about ten cents. (24) *Magnificat*, song of Virgin Mary, Luke i. 46, sung at vespers. (32) *pinners*, head-dress, with long flaps or narrow piece of cloth about the neck; *coif*, cap. (35) *Orvieto*, wine from that place.

113: 34, *Nunc dimittis*, Luke ii. 22, in Latin version as sung in Roman churches. (37) *cits*, citizens.

115: 43, *Notum tonsoribus*, known to the barbers; *Tonsor*, barber.

116: 10, *zecchines*, sequins, Venetian coins worth $2.25. (19) *pomander*, perfumed ball carried in pocket or about the neck to remove imperfections of skin. (22) *pantoufle*, slipper. (32) *Her Efficacity*, another instance of use of Italian idiom.

122: 26, *devil's-dung*, assafœtida.

123: 11, *cross-buttock*, blow across the back; *quarter-staff*, stout staff or pole used in defence or attack.

124: 39, *Uzzah*, 2 Samuel vi. 6, 7.

126: 1, *Lucretia*, who was at home spinning when other Roman women were dancing; *Susanna*, condemned to death but proved innocent by Daniel, in O. T. Apocrypha. (3) *Leda*, Correggio's picture of Leda and the Swan, in Berlin Museum.

129: 32, *Cui profuerint*, whom they might profit.

130: 3, *acquetta*, Aqua Tofana, a slow, liquid poison much used in seventeenth century by women who wished to get rid of their husbands or rivals.

131: 31, *Paphos*, in Cyprus, chief place of worship of Aphrodite.

133: 32, *Saint Rose*, who rejected suit of Hamuel, accused by him and condemned to burn, but flames burned Hamuel instead, and the stake bloomed with red and white roses; known as virgin martyr of Bethlehem. (33) *Olimpia*, sister-in-law, also niece, of Innocent X., bore this name, and were both noted for voluptuousness.

134: 33, *Place Navona*; Piazza Navona is a vast oblong square, containing three fountains.

135: 17, *Rota*, a superior Papal court.

141: 15, *fons et origo malorum*, the fountain and origin of evils.

145: 2, *headed*, beheaded. (36) *omoplat*, shoulder-blade.

146: 8, *whealed*, marked by strokes. (22) *Francis*, St. Francis of Assisi, founder of Franciscans, 1182–1226. (26) *Dominic*, St. Dominic, founder of Dominicans, 1170–1221. (31) *Homager*, one who holds lands subject to homage under feudalism.

147: 35, *suum cuique*, let each have his own.

148: 9, *porporate,* wearing purple, color of cardinals.

149: 22, *utrique sic paratus,* so prepared either way. (41) *term,* the figure of Terminus, god of boundaries.

150: 5, *Sylla, Marius,* generals of Roman Republic. (6) *hexastich,* stanza of six lines. (10) *purfled,* decorated. (14) *tittup,* frisky prance or canter. (17) *Tordinona,* Tower of Nona, prison, destroyed in 1690. The prisons built by Innocent X. were first in Europe to have cells.

151: 10, *limes,* to ensnare birds with lime.

152: 2, *sors,* lot; *a right Virgilian dip;* pages of Virgil were opened at random to secure directions for conduct. (18) *truck,* barter or exchange.

153: 43, *Pietro of Cortona,* 1596–1669, fresco painter, decorated ceilings of Palazzo Barberini. (44) *Ciro Ferri,* 1634–1689, historic painter, in manner of Cortona.

155: 5, *baioc,* about one cent. (23) *Ser Franco's merry Tales,* Franco Sacchetti, 1335–1410.

156: 43, *soldo,* about two cents.

157: 45, *Thyrsis,* young Arcadian shepherd in Virgil's seventh Eclogue; *Neæra,* country maid in third and fifth Eclogues.

159: 19, *Francis' manna;* Franciscans lived wholly upon alms given them.

161: 1, *Locusta,* female poisoner, who aided Nero in poisoning Brittanicus. (40) *Bilboa,* cutlass of flexible blade, so named from the Spanish discoverer.

163: 20, *stans pede in uno,* standing on one foot, Horace, *Satires,* i. 4, 10. (21) *plainsong,* plain notes of an air, without ornamentation.

168: 8, *succubus,* demon or evil spirit of Middle Ages.

169: 35, *Catullus,* Roman lyric poet, 87–47 B. C.

171: 18, *Ultima Thule,* legendary land of ancients at world's end. (19) *Proxima Civitas,* nearest city.

173: 3, *Ovid's art, The Art of Love* of that poet. (4) *Summa,* St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiæ,* the great work on Roman theology. (5) *Corinna;* Ovid so called in his poems his mistress Julia. (11) *merum sal,* pure salt.

177: 13, *Quis est pro Domino,* Who is on the Lord's side?

181: 43, *ad judices meos,* to my judges.

182: 18, *legist,* lawyer. (19) *Justinian's Pandects,* digest of Roman laws made in sixth century.

187: 19, *soldier-bee,* fights for protection of the hive, and in using sting sacrifices his life. (20) *exenterate,* to eviscerate or disembowel.

190: 21, *casting lots . . . for the coat of One,* Matthew xxvii. 35.

194: 14, *Capo-in-Sacco,* in Dante's *Paradiso,* xvi. 121:—

> Already had Caponsacco to the Market
> From Fiesole descended.

(18) *Mercato,* market, as referred to by Dante in preceding. (33) *Ferdinand,* second of that name, Grand-duke of Tuscany, of Medici family, 1621–1670.

195: 23, *sacrosanct,* sacred, refers to Hebrew unwillingness to pronounce the Sacred Name, substituting *Adonai,* Lord, for *Jahwe,* Jehovah. (34) *Diocletian,* Roman emperor, 284–305.

196: 13, *Onesimus*, Philemon 11, 18. (15) *Agrippa*, Acts xxvii. (18) *Fénelon*, French preacher and bishop, 1651–1751. (28) *Marinesque Adoniad*, the poem called *Adone* (Adonis) by Giovanni Battista Marino, or Marini, published in 1623. (41) *Pieve*, church of Sta. Maria della Pieve, one of the leading parish churches of Arezzo. (44) *tarocs*, a game with cards.

197: 39, *break Priscian's head*, violate the rules of grammar as laid down by Priscian, as was done by the impure Latin used by the church, the effects of hearing of which could be overcome by reading Ovid.

198: 7, *facchini*, porters. (42) *In excelsis . . . secula seculorum*, the gloria sung at end of each Psalm in Roman Church.

199: 25, *canzonet*, short song in one, two, or three parts.

201: 29, *Thyrsis and Myrtilla*, shepherd and shepherdess, so called in pastoral poetry. (44) *Ave*, the *Ave Maria*, Hail Mary, sung at evening prayer.

202: 8, *Philomel*, an Athenian maid turned into a nightingale, sings of her sorrows.

204: 44, *Lady of all the Sorrows;* the Madonna is painted with a sword piercing her heart, Luke xi. 35.

210: 24, *Saint Thomas*, Aquinas. (25) *Cephisian reed;* largest river in Attica, on west side of Athens, was the Cephisus.

211: 7, *corona*, rosary. (21) *fabled garden*, Hesperides, where golden apple was guarded by a dragon.

213: 33, *our Lady's girdle;* legend says that when Mary ascended into heaven she loosened her girdle, and that it dropped into the hands of the doubting apostle, Thomas.

215: 7, *God's sea*, Revelation iv. 6. (16) *Parian*, marble from Paros; *coprolite*, petrified dung of carnivorous reptiles.

217: 21, *angelus*, prayer to Mary, consisting of *Ave Maria*, versicle, response, and collect, said at morning, noon, and night, when bell is rung in peculiar manner to announce the hour.

222: 21, *Molière;* in his *Don Juan* this dramatist makes the libertine husband claim the nun, Donna Elvire, as his wife.

225: 19, *the paten*, plate on which the Host is carried in the Mass.

226: 13, *Pasquin;* a rough, unfinished, and mutilated statue in the Piazza di Pasquino, at the angle of the Braschi Palace, near the Piazza Navona. It was found in the sixteenth century, and is thought to represent Menelaus supporting the dead body of Patroclus. It has been greatly admired by some artists, and Bernini even thought it the finest fragment of antiquity. A tailor by the name of Pasquino, near whose shop it was, entertained his customers with the gossip of the day. At the same time, the statue was used for pasting squibs and satires upon in the vein of Pasquino's tattle. Hence these writings came to be called *pasquinades*. Jibes, satires, rhymed wit, posted in some public place, have for centuries been a peculiar and popular institution in Rome under the name of Pasquin. (20) *Bembo's verse*, Pietro Bembo, 1470–1547, secretary of Leo X., a cardinal, man of letters, and restorer of Latin. (21) *De Tribus*, title of a scandalous pamphlet called The Three Impostors (Moses, Christ, and Mahomet), which was well known in the seventeenth century. See

Poet-lore, vi. 243. (45) *sub imputatione meretricis laborat,* labors under the imputation of unchastity.

227:40, *Potiphar*, Genesis xxxix. 10.

228:10, *De Raptu Helenæ*, concerning the rape of Helen of Troy. (14) *scazons*, iambic verses, with spondee instead of iambic in final foot.

234:5, *Probationis ob defectum*, for want of sufficient proof.

235:6, *Augustinian . . . who writes the letter ;* in the pamphlet discovered by the poet, the Augustinian monk who confesses Pompilia, Fra Celestino Angelo di Sant Anna, said at the end of his deposition: "I do not say more for fear of being taxed with partiality. I know well that God alone can examine the heart. But I know also that from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks; and that my great St. Augustine says: As the life was, so is its end."

237:22, *what the marble lion meant*, symbol of severity of the church towards sinners and heretics.

239:22, *a new saint*, Saint Gaetan, or Cajetan, 1480–1547, founder of order of Theatins, canonized by Clement X. in 1671.

243:4, *San Giovanni*, built in time of Constantine, on site of palace of Plautius Lateranus, hence called "The Lateran."

245:44, *cavalier*, Perseus rescuing Andromeda from sea-monster.

246:30, *Master Malpichi*, probably Marcello Malpighi, 1628–1694, professor of medicine in Bologna University, founder of microscopic anatomy, who was in 1691 summoned to Rome by Innocent XII. and appointed his chief physician and chamberlain. (34) *Lion's-mouth*, Via di Bocca di Lione, street in Rome.

259:40, *cornet*, piece of paper twisted into conical shape.

263:5, *Mirtillo*, probably an imaginary pastoral poet.

266:44, *piece i' the Pieve ;* above high altar is a painting of Saint George killing the dragon, by Vasari.

279: title, *Pauperum Procurator*, official defender of criminals. (2) *Cinone*, diminutive of Giacinto, as are Cinozzo, Cinoncello, and other pet names used in this book. (7) *Qui*es *me cum subjunctivo*, a truce with the subjunctive. "Qui" is perhaps used as an English verb, with the meaning of to quiz, to raise many questions about the subjunctive. Professor Hiram Corson says: "The poet has used the relative *qui* as a verb, to which he has joined the ending of the third person singular, present tense, of the English verb. The 'es' of the word is in Roman type, while the 'qui' is italicized. My Giacinto 'branches me out his verb-tree on the slate . . . *Qui*es *me*,' etc., that is, gives me the rule of *qui* with the subjunctive. The word should be pronounced in one syllable, *kweez*, and is to be construed with *branches*. It is an instance of Browning's lovely literary audacity." (8) *Corderius*, Mathurin Cordier, whose *Colloquia Scholastica* was the most popular Latin school-book of the time. (14) *Papinianian*, from Papinius, greatest of Roman jurists.

280:9, *galligaskin*, large, open breeches or wide hose. (11) *Condotti*, street running from the Corso. (23) *Flaccus*, Quintus Horatius Flaccus or Horace, whose *quassa nuce*, a proverbial expression for something worthless, is in his *Satires*, ii. 5, 35.

281:15, *Non nobis, Domine, sed tibi laus !* Not unto us, O Lord, but to thee, be the praise. (22) *Pro Milone*, For Milo, the oration of

Cicero in defence of his friend of that name. (36) *Hortensius*, Roman orator of Cicero's time. (37) *Est-est*, a wine so called because a nobleman once sent his servant in advance to write "Est," it is! on any inn where the wine was particularly good; at one place the man wrote "Est-est," It is! it is! in token of its superlative excellence, and the vintage has ever since gone by that designation.

282:3, *Pro Guidone et Sociis*, For Guido and his companions. (5) *Duxit in uxorem;* in this book the poet translates the Latin immediately before or after its use, and only those sentences not so explained will be translated here. (16) *owls for augury*, regarded as birds of evil omen. (23) *Farinacci*, Prosper Farinacci, 1544–1613, procurator-general of Paul V., author of a work on torture, *Praxis et Theorica Criminalis;* also *Variæ Quæstiones*, and other legal works, which had high authority in their time. In 1599 he defended Beatrice Cenci.

283:6, *insulse*, absurd.

286:27, *Questions* here has meaning of tortures, and is so used in title of Farinacci's book. (29) *Vigiliarum*, torture by constant jerking of limbs and body.

287:11, *poet's word*, that of Virgil, *Georgics*, ii. 458. (13) *dubiety*, doubtfulness.

289:35, *to whose dominion*, *Æneid*, i. 278. (38) *Poscimur*, something is expected of us.

290:1, *Theodoric*, Ostrogothic king, 454–526. (2) *Cassiodorus*, historian and statesman, secretary of Theodoric. (17) *Scaliger*, Joseph Justus, 1484–1558, great writer and philosopher. (22) *Idyllist*, Theocritus, lyric Greek poet of third century before Christ. (31) *Ælian*, in his *De Natura Animalium*, xi. 15.

291:15, *absit*, away!

292:1, *Twelve Tables*, first laws of Rome, largely traditional or customary. (3) *Julian*, public and private laws enacted by Augustus; *Cornelian*, law of murder passed by Lucius Cornelius Sulla; *Gracchus' Law*, laws passed by the tribune of that name. (7) *diluculum*, daybreak. (15) *Saint Jerome*, monk and author of fifth century, translator of and commentator on the Bible. (29) *Gregory*, Pope Gregory the Great, 550–640, who wrote a series of dialogues on the saints.

293:10, *consentaneous*, consistent with. (11) *Saint Bernard*, 1091–1153, founder of Bernardines, one of the great church leaders of his time. (37) *pulled down pillar*, Judges xvi. 29. (44) *mansuetude*, meekness, gentleness.

294:18, *Saint Ambrose*, great bishop of fifth century, organizer of early Christian music. (31) *crepuscular*, glimmering. (38) *Moses' law*, Deuteronomy xxii. 24. (39) *put her away*, Matthew v. 32.

295:28, *acorn-eating race*, Greek and other myths describe primitive peoples as so living. (29) *bridle a horse*, James iii. 3.

297:28, *Matthæus*, Dutch jurist, 1635–1710.

299:10, *Crudum Priamum . . . Priamique pisinnos*, Iliad iv. 35, in translation of Attius Labeo, now lost, but these words preserved by the scholiast on Persius. (43) *ad Areopagum*, to the Areopagus, hill near Acropolis, Athens.

300:15, *Valerius Maximus*, Latin writer of first century, who

collected historical anecdotes and instances into his *Books of Memorable Deeds and Utterances.* (17) *Cyriacus*, patriarch of Jacobite monks, Bizona, Syria, who wrote many sermons and letters, as well as church laws, died 817. (39) *as Ovid found*, who scribbled as a youth instead of following his legal studies.

301: 9, *Brazen Head;* in the Middle Ages there was a current belief that a brazen head could be made which would speak. It is said that Roger Bacon was occupied for seven years in the construction of such a head, which he expected would tell him how to put a wall of brass around Britain. It was expected that this head would speak within a month of its completion, but, as no particular time was given, Bacon set his man to watch. At the end of a half hour the head said, 'Time is;' after another half hour, 'Time was;' and in still another, 'Time 's past,' when it fell down with a crash and was shivered in pieces.

303: 16, *Sistine*, chapel in papal palace celebrated for its frescoes. (17) *Camerlengo*, pope's chamberlain, chief of cardinals, presides when papal chair is vacant.

305: 26, *Furor ministrat arma*, Virgil, *Æneid*, i. 150. (27) *Unde mi lapidem, unde sagittas*, Horace, *Satires*, ii. 7, 116.

306: 34, *Horatian satire*, *Satires*, i. 2, 46.

310: 37, *Joab's*, 2 Samuel xii. 26. (41) *Innocentinopolis*, city of Innocent, a mere play on the pope's name and character.

312: 40, *Tobit*, Apocrypha, Book of Tobit, v. and vi.

313: 24, *Castrensis, Butringarius*, Paulus de Castro, professor of law in several Italian universities during fifteenth century; Jacobus Butrigarius, jurisconsult, 1274–1348.

318: 30, *bipsi*, perfect should be *bibi*.

319: 22, *Horatian promise*, *Epodes*, 8, 13.

321: 21, *marmoreal*, resembling marble; *uberous*, full.

322: 14, *E pluribus unum*, Virgil, *Moretum*, 103. (32) *eximious*, famous or renowned. (37) *the Florentine*, Michel Angelo. (38) *the Urbinate*, Rafael.

324: 2, *Phryne*, reference to the defence of the Greek courtesan by Hyperides, who, when he saw that his case was going against him, drew back her dress and displayed her breasts, thus gaining her cause. (9) *Tale of Tarquin*, threat of Sextus Tarquinus, when seeking to betray Lucretia, that he would swear she had been with a slave of her husband's.

325: 2, *Sermocinando*, etc., let me not declaim beyond the clock with my discoursing. (5) *Flaccus*, Horace, *Odes*, ii. 4, 17. (14) *the Teian*, Anacreon, born in Teos, Ionia; reference is to *Ode*, ii.

326: 27, *the Mantuan*, Virgil, *Eclogues* 4, 5, where the poet sings of the coming of a new order of things. (32) *passage in the Canticles*, Song of Solomon ii. 11.

327: 14, *olent*, scented. (44) *Flaccus*, Odes, ii. 4, 17.

328: 13, *Abigail*, 1 Samuel xxv. 18, 37, 42. (22) *heu prisca fides*, alas, the antique faith.

329: 2, *Comacchian*, eel of variety considered very dainty. (8) *Lernæan snake*, hydra of Lerna killed by Hercules. (12) *Insanit homo*, the man is insane. (36) *the lyrist*, Anacreon, *Ode on Women*.

330: 18, *Persius*, in his epilogue to *Satires*, 6, where the poet refers

to the glib ability of a parrot to say "good-morning" and of the magpie to speak like men, this capacity, he says, being gained by that great teacher, the stomach. (29) *Negatas artifex sequi voces*, skilful at speaking the words denied.

332: 2, *Venus losing Cupid*, see myth of Cupid and Psyche, as told by Apuleius. (3) *Idyllium Moschi*, Moschus, *Idyll* i., where Venus offers the kiss of Cypris for the recovery of Cupid. (14) *Myrtillus, Amaryllis*, names of lovers in pastoral poetry. (21) *Ulysses, Odyssey*, iv. 316. (42) *Judith*, Apocrypha, Judith xiii.

333: 11, *bane of Icarus*, Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, viii. 3, myth of Icarus getting too near the sun and thus melting off the wings his father Dædalus had fastened on him with wax. (26) *him of Gath*, Goliath, 1 Samuel xvii. 8. (30) *Saint Paul . . . o' the puny presence*, 2 Corinthians x. 10, refers to Christian tradition that Paul was a small man, which his own words confirm.

334: 10, *Helen's nepenthe, Odyssey*, iv. 285, drug given to Helen by Egyptian Polydamna, which brought oblivion of the evils of life. (29) *Suis expensis, nemo militat*, no one undertakes war to his own cost. (40) *Dido*, who founded a kingdom after her husband had been murdered by her uncle for the sake of his riches, which she carried away.

335: 21, *Sororia saltem oscula*, sisterly kisses, surely.

337: 10, *Archimedes*, Greek mathematician, 287–212 B. C., tradition says was killed at Syracuse as poet describes.

338: 9, *Medicean mode*, as in case of Venus de' Medici.

339: 18, *cubiculum*, sleeping-chamber. (34) *Demodocus, Odyssey*, viii. 330, minstrel of Alcinous, Phæacian king, from whom gods took his sight, but gave him power of song. In same book is told story of Vulcan referred to.

340: 1, *Tacitus*, Roman historian, A. D. 54–110. (7) *Thalassian-pure*; Plutarch's *Romulus* tells of maiden, at rape of Sabine women, reserved for Thalassius, whom all were anxious to keep pure, in order that the bravest might have the fairest.

341: 7, *Magdalen mistook*, John xx. 15. (37) *Hesione*, daughter of Laomedon, king of Troy, saved by Hercules when she was exposed to a sea monster in order to save the city from plague. (45) *Alcmena's son*, Hercules.

342: 11, *unblamed Æthiop, Iliad*, i. 423, twelve days' feast of Zeus with the Ethiopians. *Hercules i' the lap of Omphale*; she so won love of the hero that he forgot his labors to spin wool in the midst of her company of women. (21) *anti-Fabius*, antithesis to conduct of Fabius Maximus, who, in second Punic war, opposed Hannibal by ambush and counter-marches.

343: 9, *Sepher Toldoth Yeschu*, the book of the Generation of Jesus, New Testament apocryphal work.

344: 43, *Thucydides . . . sole joke, History of Peloponnesian War*, Book I., near end, scholiast on says, "Here the lion laughs."

345: 25, *Sophocles, Œdipus at Colonus*, 1382; Justice, in the customs of old laws, sits forever at the right hand of Zeus.

346: 13, *leet-day*, day when the court sits.

347: 26, *Redeunt Saturnia regna*, Virgil, *Eclogues*, iv. 5. (32) *mued*, moulted.

348: 40, *colocynth*, drug made from bitter cucumber, used as a purgative.

349: 8, *Forsan et hæc olim meminisse iuvabit*, Virgil, *Æneid*, i. 203. It may be that one day we shall enjoy recalling these experiences. (42) *Cujum pecus*, Virgil, *Eclogues*, iii. 1. "Whose flock is this, — Meliboeus'? No, Ægon's."

350: 10, *Maro*, Virgil. (11) *Aristæus*, son of Apollo, who taught nymphs to grow olives and to manage bees. (41) *Incipe, parve puer*, etc., Virgil, *Eclogues*, iv. 60, 285, 1218.

351: 30, *Beati pauperes*, Blessed are the poor, first Beatitude of Sermon on the Mount.

353: 23, *Triarii*, in Roman legion third formation, containing most experienced soldiers, only used as reserve. (35) *Solvuntur tabulæ*, Horace, *Satires*, ii. 86, where poet uses *solventur risu tabulæ*; the court will break up in laughter.

354: 11, *Titulus*, title.

355: 11, *panegyric of Isocrates*, 435–338 B. C., Athenian orator, who in 380 spoke in behalf of war against Persia.

356: 1, *Ahasuerus*, Esther vi. 1. (11) *Peter to Alexander*, succession of popes, from Peter to Alexander VIII., predecessor of Innocent XII. (25) *Formosus*, pope from 891 to 895. Stephen VI. or VII., who soon after succeeded him, was his political opponent, owing to a difference of opinion as to whether Arnulph or Lambert should be the emperor. Formosus favored Arnulph, and Stephen was on the side of Lambert. Stephen dug up the body of Formosus, put on his pontifical robes, seated him in the papal chair, addressed him as if he were alive, had him tried, and condemned him for unlawfully holding the papal chair. Romanus became pope in September, 897, and held the place for three months and twenty-two days. One writer says he annulled the acts of Stephen with reference to Formosus, and declared his proceedings unjust and illegal. The early writers do not make this statement. Stephen seems to have been driven from Rome and strangled in 896, for he was a bad and unjust man. Theodoric II. became pope in 898, and held the office for twenty days. He took the body of Stephen from the Tiber, where it had been thrown, declared his acts legal and valid, and had his body interred in the Vatican. John IX. followed Theodore in 898. He called a council at Ravenna of seventy-four bishops, with Lambert, who declared a legal council previously held in Rome, that had annulled Stephen's acts against Formosus. Then came Sergius III. in 904–911, who had been kept from the papal chair for many years by John IX. This struggle of the popes grew out of a fierce effort to make the emperors their tools. Platina, *Lives of the Popes*, gives details. (26) *Sigebert*, king of Austrasia, then a monk. (32) *Stephen*, 896–897.

358: 15, ΙΧΘΥΣ *which means fish*, initials of Greek words for Jesus Christ, of God, Son, Saviour, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός Θεοῦ Υἱός Σωτήρ. The fish was used by early Christians as a secret symbol by means of which they distinguished one another. (17) *Pope is Fisherman*, as successor to Peter the fisherman, Mark i. 17.

359: 4, *Luitprand*, Bishop of Cremona and chronicler of the period, who wrote of this conflict of the popes and emperors, and who said that "upon the dead body of Stephen being carried into the church

it was saluted, as many Romans informed him, by all the images of the saints there." (11) *John*, pope in 870, John IX., removed Holy See to Ravenna. (16) *Eude*, elected in 888. (19) *Auxilius*, French theologian of tenth century, whose work concerning ordinations is quoted. (23) *Marinus*, ecclesiastic of fourth century.

362:39, *sagacious Swede*, Swedenborg, 1688–1772, whose theory of mathematical probability is referred to, but the poet forgets that Swedenborg was only ten years old when he makes the pope quote him.

366:32, *paravent*, protection from wind; *ombrifuge*, protection from rain.

367:32, *soldier-crab*, hermit-crab.

370:40, *other Aretine*, Pietro Aretino, who wrote several obscene works.

373:34, *when Saturn ruled*, Greek myth of an early golden age.

374:22, *hebetude*, dullness. (42) *Rota*, papal court of twelve members, formerly supreme court of justice and appeal.

375 11, *i' the wash o' the wave*, Matthew viii. 32.

376:33, *she-pard*, female leopard.

380:32, *the other rose, the gold*, an ornament of wrought gold set with gems, blessed by the pope on fourth Sunday of Lent, and sent to distinguished individuals, churches, or states as a mark of special favor. (38) *leviathan*, Job xli. 102.

386:30, *isoscele deficient in the base;* two sides, intelligence and strength, are seen; but the other, goodness, does not appear.

387:2, *I have said ye are Gods*, John x. 34. (21) *explains choppy cheek by chemic law*, man explains the effect of cold on the chappy (= chapped) cheek by chemical action. — Professor Genung.

391:29, *Tien*, the Chinese name for Heaven, in the sense of creator and revealer; *Shang-ti*, an identical name with the Chinese for God, or the divine source of things. (36) *Cardinal Tournon*, apostolic vicar, sent to China in 1701; his indiscretions caused his imprisonment by the emperor.

392:6, *adept of the Rosy Cross*, member of the order of Rosicrucians, a name derived from *ros*, dew, and *crux*, cross. They believed that dew would dissolve light and give them the philosopher's stone. (7) *Great Work*, Magnum Opus of sages, who sought to find the absolute in the infinite, the indefinite and finite.

393:8, *some bard, philosopher or both;* the speech that follows is spoken by Euripides.

394:1, *Third Poet*, Euripides; *the Two*, Æschylus and Sophocles. (12) *Paul spoke*, Acts xxiii. 23; xxiv. 10, 25. (24) *Galileo*, the great astronomer, 1564–1642.

395:40, *Paul answered Seneca;* a Christian tradition brings Paul and Seneca together as friends in Rome, and there exists a correspondence between them, sometimes printed in the N. T. Apocrypha, but which is undoubtedly of a much later date than the first century.

396:36, *Nero's cross and stake*, the crucifying and burning of Christians by this Emperor.

398:16, *antimasque*, ridiculous interlude; *kibe*, chap or crack in flesh. (37) *morrice*, morris, a dance borrowed and named from the Moors.

399: 8, *Loyola*, founder of order of Society of Jesus or Jesuits, 1491–1556.

400: 6, *nemini honorem trado*, I will not give mine honor to another.

401: 30, *Barabbas' self*, Mark xxvii. 15. (34) *the three little taps;* on the death of a pope his chamberlain strikes his forehead three times with a silver mallet and calls to him, to make sure that he is dead. (43) *petit-maître*, dandy or coxcomb. (44) *Sanctus et Benedictus*, holy and blessed.

402: 16, *Priam*, the last king of Troy. (17) *Hecuba*, wife of Priam; *non tali auxilio*, Virgil, *Æneid*, ii. 519: Non tali auxilio nec defensoribus istis tempus eget, the crisis requires not such aid nor such defenders as thou art.

404: 4, *battlemented convent-block . . . Certosa*, La Certosa, castle-like Carthusian monastery in Val Emo, four miles from Florence, built about 1341.

408: 16, *Mouth-of-Truth*, Bocca della Verità, a large stone mask in the portico of the church of Sta. Maria in Cormedin; an old belief is that whoever puts his hand into the mouth of the mask, if he has told falsehood, cannot withdraw it again.

409: 28, *elucubrate*, to work by candle-light, hence figuratively to study hard. (44) *Merry Tales*, novels of Franco Sacchetti.

410: 10, *Albano*, Francesco Albano, 1578–1660, celebrated painter born at Bologna, whose picture of the assumption of St. Sebastian is in the church in Rome named after that saint. (29) *Atlas*, first cervical vertebra, on which head rests. (30) *Axis*, the second cervical vertebra; *symphyses*, the cartilaginous union of the bones with each other. (32) *the silver cord . . . golden bowl*, Ecclesiastes xii. 6. (41) *extravasate*, act of letting out of the proper containing vessels or ducts. (42) *Roland's sword . . . Oliver's mace*, heroes in *Song of Roland*. (45) *arachnoid*, like spider's web, membrane of the brain.

411: 18, *Petrus, quo vadis*, Peter, whither goest thou? refers to legend that Peter, fleeing from a martyr's fate, met Christ going towards Rome, and asked him, Domine, quo vadis? Lord, whither goest thou? the reply being, Venio iterum crucifigi, I come to be crucified again; which caused Peter to turn back and accept his martyrdom. (21) *Dorcas*, Acts ix. 36.

415: 17, *Gorgon shield*, worn by Minerva, on which was head of Medusa, deadliest of the three Gorgons, that turned those to stone who looked on it.

416: 34, *King Cophetua*, not him of Africa, evidently, who married the beggar-maid, but perhaps an invented instance of Browning's own.

419: 10, *tinkle*, ringing of a bell to warn the worshippers of the elevation of the Host in the Mass. (13) *Trebbian*, wine from Trevi, in valley of Clitumnus.

420: 16, *caudatory*, dependent, one under control of another.

421: 21, *hocus-pocus*, said to be corruption of *hoc est corpus*, words used by priest in consecration of the sacrifice of the mass; also said to be from Ochus Bochus, an Italian magician invoked by magicians. Probably neither explanation is correct.

424: 6, *Vallombrosa Convent*, famous monastery near Florence, founded about 1650.

428: 34, *Etruscan monster;* the region between Rome and Florence was the site of the Etrurian race which preceded and was conquered by the Romans, the remains of whose artistic genius are numerous and remarkable, that mentioned being of the fabulous Chimæra destroyed by Bellerophon.

435: 7, *Armida . . . Rinaldo,* lovers in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered.*

439: 17, *tœnia,* tape-worm.

440: 34, *Stinche,* prison.

443: 10, *Jansenius,* Cornelius Jansenius, originator of Jansenists and indirectly of Molinists. (37) *helping Vienna . . . Mustafa,* defeat of Kara Mustapha, Turkish general, who with a large army besieged Vienna in 1683, but was defeated by John Sobieska, king of Poland, and his army utterly routed; Duke Charles of Lorraine being sent by pope to aid Christian forces.

444: 32, *gaudeamus,* let us be glad.

446: 11, *Virgil's fieriest word,* Æneid, viii. 314. (14) *Jove Ægiochus,* Ægis-bearing Jove.

447: 7, *Master Pietro,* Pietro Aretino. (20) *revealed to strike Pan dead,* legend that when crucifixion took place a voice was heard proclaiming, "Pan is dead."

448: 30, *Romano vivitur more,* Life goes in the Roman way.

449: 2, *Byblis in fluvium . . . Lycaon in lupum,* Byblis into a river, Lycaon into a wolf, transformations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*

451: 3, *Paynimrie,* paganism or heathendom. (43) *Olimpias . . . Biancas,* fond and fast women, Olimpia being voluptuous niece of Innocent X., and Bianca a Venetian who tried to save her husband from death, failed, and died of a broken heart. (44) *Ormuz,* island in Persian sea, famous diamond market.

452: 15, *Delilah,* Judges xvi. 9. (24) *Circe,* sorceress in *Odyssey,* who changes companions of Ulysses into swine. (27) *Lucrezia,* Borgia, leader in many crimes.

455: 17, *Albano;* Giovanni Francisco Albani succeeded Innocent XII.

456: 42, *that Athenian;* it is said that Themistocles killed himself by drinking bull's blood.

457: 2, *accursed psalm,* that chanted for the dying by the Brothers of Mercy when they attend criminals to the scaffold.

458: 12, *Wormwood Star,* Revelation viii., the star which the belief of the Middle Ages thought appeared when death approached.

459: 32, *Fénelon will be condemned;* Fénelon's book, *Explication des Maximes des Saints,* was condemned by Innocent, in 1699, because of its advocacy of Quietism.

460: 12, *Dogana,* custom-house. (27) *palchetto,* stage or scaffold, *palchetti* being plural. (36) *Three Streets,* Corso, Via del Babuino, and Via di Ripetta, going south from Piazza del Popolo.

461: 35, *Tern Quatern,* tern is prize in lottery resulting from combination of three numbers, a quatern of four numbers.

462: 10, *Pater,* 'Our Father' in Lord's Prayer; *Ave,* Hail Mary. (11) *Salve Regina Cœli,* Hail, Queen of Heaven, hymn sung at vespers. (16) *Umbilicus,* navel cord. (30) *just-a-corps,* a coat fitting tightly to the body.

463: 6, *Socius,* companion.

464: 22, *Quantum est hominum venustiorum*, Catullus, 3, 2, all the men who have any cultivation. (35) *hactenus senioribus*, thus far for our elders.

465: 20, *Themis*, goddess of justice, daughter of heaven and earth, the speaker holding that the law-court in Tuscany is better than that in Rome. (26) *case of Gomez*, an actual case the poet found in the book from which he took this murder tale. (27) *Reliqua differamus in crastinum*, the rest let us put off until to-morrow. (28) *estafette*, courier or news-carrier.

466: 23, *adverti supplico humiliter*, I humbly request that it be noticed.

468: 2, *Spreti*, aid to De Archangelis, advocate of the poor.

469: 2, *culver*, wood-pigeon. (27) *their idol-god an Ass;* early Christians were accused of such worship by their opponents. (45) *palm-branch*, Christian emblem in catacombs, used as symbol of moral victory.

472: 35, *ampollosity*, puffed-up or wind-bag quality.

474: 14, *Astræa redux*, justice brought back. (44) *Martial's phrase;* here umbilicus means the ornamental knob at the end of the stick on which ancient books were rolled; hence Martial, in iv. 89, in using *ad umbilicum pervenire*, means, to arrive at the end of the book.

475: 22, *Locum-tenens*, one holding the place of another, a proxy. (40) *Gonfalonier*, the mayor, because the bearer of the gonfalon, or banner of the city.

476: 22, *Petrarch*, born in Arezzo, as was *Buonarroti*, otherwise Michel Angelo; but the latter in the province, not the city itself. (23) *vexillifer*, standard-bearer. (24) *the Patavinian*, Livy, who was born in Padua or Patavium. (26) *Janus of the Double Face*, a Roman deity represented with two faces, because seeing both the past and the future.

477: 38, *Lyric Love;* the poet's dead wife is here invoked as the inspiration of his muse, as she was at the end of the first book. (39) *the poet*, Nicolò Tommaseo, 1803–1874, Italian poet, critic, and patriot, who wrote the inscription for the walls of Casa Guidi on the tablet erected there by the municipality of Florence in memory of Mrs. Browning: Qui scrisse e mori Elizabeth Barrett Browning, che in cuore di Donna seppe unire saprenza de dotto, e facondia di poeta, fece del suo aureo verso, anello, fra Italia e Inghilterra, pose questa memoria Firenze grata, A. D. 1861. In English: Here wrote and died Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who in her woman's heart united the wisdom of the sage and the eloquence of the poet, with her golden verse linking Italy to England, grateful Florence placed this memorial, A. D. 1861.

VOLUME IV

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.

After his marriage in 1846, and his settlement in Florence the following year, the first work Browning did was to prepare for publication an edition of his poems in two volumes. It included *Paracelsus*, and the poems and dramas published originally in *Bells and Pomegranates.* Mrs. Browning wrote that he was giving "peculiar attention to the objections made against certain obscurities." In the preface he made this statement: "Many of these pieces were out of print, the rest had been withdrawn from circulation, when the corrected edition, now submitted to the public, was prepared. The various poems and dramas have received the author's most careful revision."

In 1850 the poet wrote his *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*, two poems, in fact, but treating the same subject from different points of view. The author evidently intended to have them regarded as one, by the form of the title and by the manner of their publication. They also agree in being, with one or two exceptions, the only poems in which Browning has spoken in his own personality. They show the influence of Mrs. Browning in their positive religious attitude, though in this respect the two poems differ somewhat radically from each other. In *Christmas Eve* the point of view is that of the traditional conception of a literal revelation, while *Easter Day* is more philosophical, and emphasizes the importance of a progressive expression of religious truth.

Christmas Eve and Easter Day.

In 1855 was published *Men and Women*, in two volumes. The first volume contained Love among the Ruins; A Lover's Quarrel; Evelyn Hope; Up at a Villa — Down in the City; A Woman's Last Word; Fra Lippo Lippi; A Toccata of Galuppi's; By the Fire-Side; Any Wife to any Husband; An Epistle concerning the Strange Medical

Men and Women.

Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician; Mesmerism; A Serenade at the Villa; My Star; Instans Tyrannus; A Pretty Woman; Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came; Respectability; A Light Woman; The Statue and the Bust; Love in a Life; Life in a Love; How it strikes a Contemporary; The Last Ride Together; The Patriot; Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha; Bishop Blougram's Apology; Memorabilia. The contents of the second volume were Andrea del Sarto (called the Faultless Painter); Before; After; In Three Days; In a Year; Old Pictures in Florence; In a Balcony; Saul; "De Gustibus;" Women and Roses; Protus; Holy-Cross Day; The Guardian Angel, a Picture at Fano; Cleon; the Twins; Popularity; The Heretic's Tragedy; A Middle-Age Interlude; Two in the Campagna; A Grammarian's Funeral; One Way of Love; Another Way of Love; "Transcendentalism: a Poem in Twelve Books;" Misconceptions; One Word More; To E. B. B.

This work also showed the influence of Mrs. Browning, in that the poems are more popular in character and more lyrical in quality than anything else Browning produced. This was the result of a general influence on her part, for he did not submit his poems to her for revision, or for such suggestions as she might offer. Only when the volume was completed did it come under her eye. The two poets worked quite separately from each other, and they were very careful to preserve each other's independence. Browning saw nothing of the *Portuguese Sonnets* until the volume was ready for publication, and he had no hint that such a work was in preparation. It was rather the personal sympathy, the effect of wedded life, and the indirect result of the comparison of literary methods, that showed themselves in *Men and Women*. It is only when this work is put by the side of the *Portuguese Sonnets* that we realize how profoundly their wedded life influenced both these poets.

When he was writing *Men and Women*, Browning assigned himself the task of producing a poem every day. For a fortnight he was faithful to this resolution, and *Childe Roland*, *Women and Roses*, and other poems, were produced at this rapid pace. The final poem, addressed to Mrs. Browning, was

written in London, in September, 1855, and contained a reference to the fifty poems which found a place in *Men and Women.* In the collected edition of his poems, published in 1863, Browning assigned many of these poems to other general titles, while a few not originally published in it were added to the collection of *Men and Women.*

The only attempt at dramatic writing Browning made after the completion of *Bells and Pomegranates* was *In a Balcony,* which was published in *Men and Women.* This drama was begun at Bagni di Lucca, or the Baths of Lucca, while the poet was walking alone through the forest glades, in the summer of 1853, and brought to its present state the following winter in Rome. That Browning had really outgrown his capacity for dramatic writing is seen in the fact that this work was never completed. The first part of the play was not written; and it evidently begins at about the middle of the plot, which is entirely original; and no time or place is indicated.

IN A BALCONY.

Browning continued to write short poems for some years, and he gave to the public his *Dramatis Personæ* in 1864. He began the writing of these poems before the death of Mrs. Browning, and that event interrupted their production. In the summer of 1862, however, he was at work again. In this volume were included James Lee; Gold Hair, a Legend of Pornic; The Worst of It; Dîs Aliter Visum, or Le Byron de nos Jours; Too Late; Abt Vogler (after he has been extemporizing upon the Musical Instrument of his Invention); Rabbi ben Ezra; A Death in the Desert; Caliban upon Setebos, or Natural Theology in the Island; Confessions; May and Death; Prospice; Youth and Art; A Face; A Likeness; Mr. Sludge, "the Medium;" Apparent Failure; Epilogue. Of this volume Mrs. Orr says: "His presence in England had doubtless stimulated the public interest in his productions; and we may fairly credit *Dramatis Personæ* with having finally awakened his countrymen of all classes to the fact that a great creative power had arisen among them."

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

The next poem given to the public by our poet was *The Ring and the Book.* Then he turned his attention to the

Greek dramatists and produced *Balaustion's Adventure*. His first work in this direction appeared in *Dramatic Lyrics*, and was the fragment to which he gave the title of *Artemis Prologizes*. He prepared a note to accompany this poem, but it was omitted. It was in these words: "I had better say perhaps that the above is nearly all retained of a tragedy I composed, much against my endeavor, while in bed with a fever two years ago; it went farther into the story of Hippolytus and Aricia; but when I got well, putting only thus much down at once, I soon forgot the remainder." The poem was the result of the reading of the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, which he continues by making use of the legend which says that Hippolytus was revived by Artemis, but falls in love with Aricia, one of her nymphs.

BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE.

It was in this poem that Browning first adopted that form of spelling Greek words which he followed to the end of his life. In the preface to the translation of the *Agamemnon*, 1877, he set forth his theory on that subject, and defended it with zeal and knowledge. He had occasion now and then in other places to say a word on the subject. "He even assured his friends," says Mrs. Orr, "that if the innovation had been rationally opposed, or simply not accepted, he would probably himself have abandoned it. But when, years later, in *Balaustion's Adventure*, the new spelling became the subject of attacks which all but ignored the existence of the work from any other point of view, the thought of yielding was no longer admissible."

Mrs. Orr prints in her *Hand-book* a note from Browning with reference to these attacks. It is in reply to an article in the *Nineteenth Century* for January, 1886, written by Mr. Frederick Harrison. "I have just noticed," wrote Browning, "in this month's *Nineteenth Century* that it is inquired by a humorous objector to the practice of spelling (under exceptional conditions) Greek proper names as they are spelled in Greek literature, why the same principle should not be adopted by Ægyptologists, Hebraists, Sanscrittists, Accadians, Moabites, Hittites, and Cuneiformists? Adopt it by all means whenever the particular language enjoyed by any unfortunate possessor of these

shall, like Greek, have been for about three hundred years insisted upon in England, as an acquisition of paramount importance at school and college, for every aspirant to distinction in learning, even at the cost of six or seven years' study, — a sacrifice considered well worth making for even an imperfect acquaintance with the most perfect language in the world. Further, it will be adopted whenever the letters substituted for those in ordinary English use shall do no more than represent to the unscholarly what the scholar accepts without scruple, when, for the hundredth time, he reads the word which, for once, he has occasion to write in English, and which he concludes must be as euphonic as the rest of a language renowned for euphony. And finally, the practice will be adopted whenever the substituted letters effect no sort of organic change, so as to jostle the word from its pride of place in English verse or prose. 'Themistokles' fits in quietly everywhere with or without the 'k;' but in a certain poetical translation I remember by a young friend, of the *Anabasis*, beginning thus felicitously, '*Cyrus the Great and Artaxerxes* (*Whose temper bloodier than a Turk's is*) *Were children both of the mild, pious, And happy monarch King Darius*, who fails to see that, although a correct 'Kuraush' may pass, yet 'Darayavash' disturbs the metre as well as the rhyme? It seems, however, that 'Themistokles' may be winked at; not so the 'harsh and subversive "Kirke."' But let the objector ask somebody with no knowledge to subvert, how he supposes 'Circe' is spelled in Greek, and the answer will be, 'With a soft *c*.' Inform him that no such letter exists, and he guesses, 'Then with *s*, if there be anything like it.' Tell him that, to eye and ear equally, his own *k* answers the purpose, and you have at all events taught him that much, if little enough — and why does he live unless to learn a little!"

Balaustion's Adventure was published in 1871, and was written at the suggestion of Lady Cowper, to whom it was dedicated. It is something more than a translation of the *Alcestis* of Euripides, and is a defense of that poet as the most human of all the Greek dramatists, and the most modern in spirit. The influence of the dramatists is nobly indicated in the introduction to the *Alcestis*, which relates the adventure of Balaustion.

The Greeks in every country took great interest in the works of the dramatic poets, and were eager to see their plays on the stage or to hear them recited. The ability to recite their plays or portions of them was sometimes the occasion of the liberation of captives and their kindly treatment. The adventure of Balaustion is based on a passage in Plutarch's *Lives*, contained in his biography of Nicias, the leader of the expedition against Syracuse. Many of the Athenians and their allies were taken prisoners and suffered great barbarities, while many who were discreet and orderly were set free.

"Several were saved for the sake of Euripides," says Plutarch, in Clough's translation, "whose poetry, it appears, was in request among the Sicilians more than among any of the settlers out of Greece. And when any travelers arrived that could tell them some passage or give them any specimen of his verses, they were delighted to be able to communicate them to one another. Many of the captives who got safe back to Athens are said, after they reached home, to have gone and made their acknowledgments to Euripides, relating how that some of them had been released from their slavery by teaching what they could remember of his poems, and others, when straggling after the fight, had been relieved with meat and drink for repeating some of his lyrics. Nor need this be any wonder, for it is told that a ship of Caunus fleeing into one of their harbors for protection, pursued by pirates, was not received, but forced back, till one asked if they knew any of Euripides' verses, and on their saying they did, they were admitted and their ship brought into harbor."

Browning was compelled to leave France hastily in the summer of 1870, on account of the Franco-Prussian war. He saw intimately the conditions produced by the second Empire, and he had watched for many years the career of Napoleon III.

PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU

His reflections on this subject he gave to the public in his *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Savior of Society*, which was written in Scotland during the summer of 1871, and was published in December of that year.

In this poem Hohenstiel-Schwangau represents France; but the name is formed from Hohen Schwangau, one of the castles

of the king of Bavaria. The Prince is Louis Napoleon III., and it is he who is speaking throughout the poem, addressing a woman who has asked about his career. The poem is a study of his character, and the means by which he came to be the emperor of the French. The poet does not adhere strictly to history, and he often discusses quite other moral problems than those which rightly belong to the character of Napoleon III.

A curious interest connected with this poem is that which grows out of the fact of Mrs. Browning's great admiration for Napoleon III. She really regarded him, at the time when he became the president of the French republic, as a savior of society, and one from whom the greatest things could be expected. She had "a truly marvelous belief in Louis Napoleon's goodness and genius," says Mr. John H. Ingram, her biographer. She idealized him, made him a hero, looked to him for the salvation of Italy, and believed that he would realize her own glowing convictions concerning democracy. Writing to one of her friends in 1852, Miss Mary R. Mitford gave an account of Mrs. Browning's faith in Louis Napoleon: "Mrs. Browning says that the courage and activity shown in the *coup d'état* have never been surpassed. She says that the Prince says of himself, that his life will have four phases, — one all rashness and impudence, necessary to make his name known, and to make his own faults known to himself; the next, to combat with and triumph over anarchy; the third, the consolidation of France and pacification of Europe; and last, *un coup de pistolet.* The passion of parties is so excited, that the only thing which renders the last improbable is the sort of fate by which men of that high and calm courage often escape dangers by braving them." In a letter to Miss Mitford is to be found these words written by Mrs. Browning: "I wonder if the Empress pleases you as well as the Emperor. I approve altogether — and none the less, that he has offended Austria in the mode of announcement. Every cut of the whip on the face of Austria is an especial compliment to me, or so I feel it. Let him lead the Democracy to do its duty to the world, and use to the utmost his great opportunities." In her *Poems before Congress*, and in other poems about Italian independence, especially in

her *Napoleon III. in Italy*, she expressed her unbounded faith in Louis Napoleon. She did not live long enough to have that faith destroyed.

At first, Browning shared in a measure the faith of his wife, for he too was a lover of Italy, and anxiously hoped for its independence and unity. That early faith doubtless had much to do in causing him to write his subtle analysis of the character and career of the man who so thoroughly disappointed his hopes. Later events than those of 1852 showed that Louis Napoleon was in some degree an adventurer, that he did not believe in his own democratic utterances, and that he cared more for personal success and glory than for the liberation of oppressed peoples. The contrast between what he seemed to be and what he proved to be, led the poet into his study of a character so well adapted to his love of eccentric and complex personalities.

Writing to a friend soon after the publication of the poem, Browning said: "By this time you have got my little book (*Hohenstiel*) and seen for yourself whether I make the best or the worst of the case. I think, in the main, he meant to do what I say, and, but for his weakness — grown more apparent in his last years than formerly — would have done what I say he did not. I thought badly of him at the beginning of his career, *et pour cause*: better afterward, on the strength of the promises he made, and gave indications of intending to redeem. I think him very weak in the last miserable year. At his worst I prefer him to Thiers's best. . . . I am glad you like what the editor of the *Edinburgh* calls my eulogium on the second empire — which it is not, any more than what another wiseacre affirms is to be, 'a scandalous attack on the old constant friend of England' — it is just what I imagine the man might, if he pleased, say of himself."

In a letter to a friend, written in January, 1872, Browning made mention of another poem as then being written. "Spite of my ailments and bewailments," he wrote, "I have just all but finished another poem of quite another kind, which shall amuse you in the spring, I hope." This was *Fifine at the Fair*, which was published at the time pro-

FIFINE AT THE FAIR

mised. The motto to the poem was taken from Molière's *Don Juan*, i. 3, and indicates the character of the discussion to which the poem is devoted. It is a study not only of married life, but of sexual love in several of its phases. It is probable that Byron's *Don Juan* and *Childe Harold* gave hints for such study, to this extent, at least; that, whereas Molière and Byron had drawn Don Juan as essentially bad, it seemed to Browning desirable to permit a defense on his own part and behalf. What can Don Juan say for himself, how will he explain and defend his own career? Browning has endeavored to answer that question.

It seems to have been only a second thought, however, which caused Browning to draw from *Don Juan* such suggestion as it gave him; and the primary motive came from his life at Pornic, a small seacoast town in Brittany, where he spent the summers of 1863, 1864, and 1865. His house was at Ste. Marie, near Pornic, and his life there he described in one of his letters: "This is a wild little place in Brittany, something like that village where we stayed last year. Close to the sea — a hamlet of a dozen houses, perfectly lonely — one may walk on the edge of the low rocks by the sea for miles. Our house is the Mayor's, large enough, clean and bare. If I could, I would stay just as I am for many a day. I feel out of the very earth sometimes as I sit here at the window; with the little church, a field, a few houses, and the sea. On a week day there is nobody in the village, plenty of haystacks, cows, and fowls." According to Mrs. Orr, "Mr. Browning was, with his family, at Pornic many years ago, and there saw the gypsy who is the original of Fifine. His fancy was evidently sent roaming by her audacity, her strength, the contrast which she presented to the more spiritual types of womanhood; and this contrast eventually found expression in a poetic theory of life, in which these opposite types and their corresponding modes of attraction became the necessary complement of each other. As he laid down the theory Mr. Browning would be speaking in his own person. But he would turn into some one else in the act of working it out, for it insensibly carried with it a plea for yielding to those opposite attractions, not only successively, but at the same time,

and a modified Don Juan would grow up under his pen, thinking in some degree his thoughts, using in some degree his language, and only standing out as a distinctive character at the end of the poem."

Mrs. Orr expresses the opinion, in her biography of the poet, that "some leaven of bitterness" must have been working in Browning at this time to induce him to write such a poem as this. She says it is quite out of harmony with his other work, and goes so far as to intimate that he had lost his mental poise. Such criticism as this is as injudicious as it is unjust. There is no evidence in the poem or in any of its expressed opinions indicative of mental unsoundness. It is quite certain that the husband of Mrs. Browning, the supreme poet of wedded love, was not in this poem trying to vindicate sexual liberty or to justify the career of Don Juan. That the poem adds little to the poetic reputation of Browning is quite true, but it is quite unnecessary to assume that he had ceased from his high moral standard or his lofty ideal of wedded love.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

FLORENCE, 1850.

CHRISTMAS-EVE.

I.

Out of the little chapel I burst
Into the fresh night-air again.
Five minutes full, I waited first
In the doorway, to escape the rain
That drove in gusts down the common's centre
At the edge of which the chapel stands,
Before I plucked up heart to enter.
Heaven knows how many sorts of hands
Reached past me, groping for the latch
Of the inner door that hung on catch
More obstinate the more they fumbled,
Till, giving way at last with a scold
Of the crazy hinge, in squeezed or tumbled
One sheep more to the rest in fold,
And left me irresolute, standing sentry
In the sheepfold's lath-and-plaster entry,
Six feet long by three feet wide,
Partitioned off from the vast inside —
I blocked up half of it at least.
No remedy; the rain kept driving.
They eyed me much as some wild beast,
That congregation, still arriving,
Some of them by the main road, white
A long way past me into the night,
Skirting the common, then diverging;
Not a few suddenly emerging
From the common's self through the paling-gaps,
— They house in the gravel-pits perhaps,
Where the road stops short with its safeguard border
Of lamps, as tired of such disorder; —
But the most turned in yet more abruptly
From a certain squalid knot of alleys,
Where the town's bad blood once slept corruptly,

Which now the little chapel rallies
And leads into day again, — its priestliness
Lending itself to hide their beastliness
So cleverly (thanks in part to the mason),
And putting so cheery a whitewashed face on
Those neophytes too much in lack of it,
That, where you cross the common as I did,
And meet the party thus presided,
"Mount Zion" with Love-lane at the back of it,
They front you as little disconcerted
As, bound for the hills, her fate averted,
And her wicked people made to mind him,
Lot might have marched with Gomorrah behind him.

II.

Well, from the road, the lanes or the common,
In came the flock: the fat weary woman,
Panting and bewildered, down-clapping
Her umbrella with a mighty report,
Grounded it by me, wry and flapping,
A wreck of whalebones; then, with a snort,
Like a startled horse, at the interloper
(Who humbly knew himself improper,
But could not shrink up small enough)
— Round to the door, and in, — the gruff
Hinge's invariable scold
Making my very blood run cold.
Prompt in the wake of her, up-pattered
On broken clogs, the many-tattered
Little old-faced peaking sister-turned-mother
Of the sickly babe she tried to smother
Somehow up, with its spotted face,
From the cold, on her breast, the one warm place;
She too must stop, wring the poor ends dry
Of a draggled shawl, and add thereby
Her tribute to the door-mat, sopping
Already from my own clothes' dropping,
Which yet she seemed to grudge I should stand on:
Then, stooping down to take off her pattens,
She bore them defiantly, in each hand one,
Planted together before her breast
And its babe, as good as a lance in rest.
Close on her heels, the dingy satins
Of a female something, past me flitted,
With lips as much too white, as a streak
Lay far too red on each hollow cheek;

And it seemed the very door-hinge pitied
All that was left of a woman once,
Holding at least its tongue for the nonce.
Then a tall yellow man, like the Penitent Thief,
With his jaw bound up in a handkerchief,
And eyelids screwed together tight,
Led himself in by some inner light.
And, except from him, from each that entered,
I got the same interrogation —
"What, you the alien, you have ventured
To take with us, the elect, your station?
A carer for none of it, a Gallio!" —
Thus, plain as print, I read the glance
At a common prey, in each countenance
As of huntsman giving his hounds the tallyho.
And, when the door's cry drowned their wonder,
The draught, it always sent in shutting,
Made the flame of the single tallow candle
In the cracked square lantern I stood under,
Shoot its blue lip at me, rebutting
As it were, the luckless cause of scandal:
I verily fancied the zealous light
(In the chapel's secret, too!) for spite
Would shudder itself clean off the wick,
With the airs of a Saint John's Candlestick.
There was no standing it much longer.
"Good folks," thought I, as resolve grew stronger,
"This way you perform the Grand-Inquisitor
When the weather sends you a chance visitor?
You are the men, and wisdom shall die with you,
And none of the old Seven Churches vie with you!
But still, despite the pretty perfection
To which you carry your trick of exclusiveness,
And, taking God's word under wise protection,
Correct its tendency to diffusiveness,
And bid one reach it over hot ploughshares, —
Still, as I say, though you've found salvation,
If I should choose to cry, as now, 'Shares!' —
See if the best of you bars me my ration!
I prefer, if you please, for my expounder
Of the laws of the feast, the feast's own Founder;
Mine 's the same right with your poorest and sickliest,
Supposing I don the marriage vestiment:
So, shut your mouth and open your Testament,
And carve me my portion at your quickliest!"
Accordingly, as a shoemaker's lad

With wizened face in want of soap,
And wet apron wound round his waist like a rope,
(After stopping outside, for his cough was bad,
To get the fit over, poor gentle creature,
And so avoid disturbing the preacher)
— Passed in, I sent my elbow spikewise
At the shutting door, and entered likewise,
Received the hinge's accustomed greeting,
And crossed the threshold's magic pentacle,
And found myself in full conventicle,
— To wit, in Zion Chapel Meeting,
On the Christmas-Eve of 'Forty-nine,
Which, calling its flock to their special clover,
Found all assembled and one sheep over,
Whose lot, as the weather pleased, was mine.

III.

I very soon had enough of it.
The hot smell and the human noises,
And my neighbor's coat, the greasy cuff of it,
Were a pebble-stone that a child's hand poises,
Compared with the pig-of-lead-like pressure
Of the preaching man's immense stupidity,
As he poured his doctrine forth, full measure,
To meet his audience's avidity.
You needed not the wit of the Sibyl
To guess the cause of it all, in a twinkling:
No sooner our friend had got an inkling
Of treasure hid in the Holy Bible,
(Whene'er 't was the thought first struck him,
How death, at unawares, might duck him
Deeper than the grave, and quench
The gin-shop's light in hell's grim drench)
Than he handled it so, in fine irreverence,
As to hug the book of books to pieces:
And, a patchwork of chapters and texts in severance,
Not improved by the private dog's-ears and creases,
Having clothed his own soul with, he 'd fain see equipt
yours, —
So tossed you again your Holy Scriptures.
And you picked them up, in a sense, no doubt:
Nay, had but a single face of my neighbors
Appeared to suspect that the preacher's labors
Were help which the world could be saved without,
'T is odds but I might have borne in quiet
A qualm or two at my spiritual diet,

Or (who can tell?) perchance even mustered
Somewhat to urge in behalf of the sermon:
But the flock sat on, divinely flustered,
Sniffing, methought, its dew of Hermon
With such content in every snuffle,
As the devil inside us loves to ruffle.
My old fat woman purred with pleasure,
And thumb round thumb went twirling faster,
While she, to his periods keeping measure,
Maternally devoured the pastor.
The man with the handkerchief untied it,
Showed us a horrible wen inside it,
Gave his eyelids yet another screwing,
And rocked himself as the woman was doing.
The shoemaker's lad, discreetly choking,
Kept down his cough. 'T was too provoking!
My gorge rose at the nonsense and stuff of it;
So, saying like Eve when she plucked the apple,
"I wanted a taste, and now there 's enough of it,"
I flung out of the little chapel.

IV.

There was a lull in the rain, a lull
In the wind too; the moon was risen,
And would have shone out pure and full,
But for the ramparted cloud-prison,
Block on block built up in the West,
For what purpose the wind knows best,
Who changes his mind continually.
And the empty other half of the sky
Seemed in its silence as if it knew
What, any moment, might look through
A chance gap in that fortress massy: —
Through its fissures you got hints
Of the flying moon, by the shifting tints,
Now, a dull lion-color, now, brassy
Burning to yellow, and whitest yellow,
Like furnace-smoke just ere flames bellow,
All a-simmer with intense strain
To let her through, — then blank again,
At the hope of her appearance failing.
Just by the chapel, a break in the railing
Shows a narrow path directly across;
'T is ever dry walking there, on the moss —
Besides, you go gently all the way up-hill.
I stooped under and soon felt better;

My head grew lighter, my limbs more supple,
As I walked on, glad to have slipt the fetter.
My mind was full of the scene I had left,
That placid flock, that pastor vociferant,
— How this outside was pure and different!
The sermon, now — what a mingled weft
Of good and ill! Were either less,
Its fellow had colored the whole distinctly;
But alas for the excellent earnestness,
And the truths, quite true if stated succinctly,
But as surely false, in their quaint presentment,
However to pastor and flock's contentment!
Say rather, such truths looked false to your eyes.
With his provings and parallels twisted and twined,
Till how could you know them, grown double their size
In the natural fog of the good man's mind,
Like yonder spots of our roadside lamps,
Haloed about with the common's damps?
Truth remains true, the fault 's in the prover;
The zeal was good, and the aspiration;
And yet, and yet, yet, fifty times over,
Pharaoh received no demonstration,
By his Baker's dream of Baskets Three,
Of the doctrine of the Trinity, —
Although, as our preacher thus embellished it,
Apparently his hearers relished it
With so unfeigned a gust — who knows if
They did not prefer our friend to Joseph?
But so it is everywhere, one way with all of them!
These people have really felt, no doubt,
A something, the motion they style the Call of them;
And this is their method of bringing about,
By a mechanism of words and tones,
(So many texts in so many groans)
A sort of reviving and reproducing,
More or less perfectly, (who can tell?)
The mood itself, which strengthens by using;
And how that happens, I understand well.
A tune was born in my head last week,
Out of the thump-thump and shriek-shriek
Of the train, as I came by it, up from Manchester;
And when, next week, I take it back again,
My head will sing to the engine's clack again,
While it only makes my neighbor's haunches stir,
— Finding no dormant musical sprout
In him, as in me, to be jolted out.

'T is the taught already that profits by teaching;
He gets no more from the railway's preaching
Than, from this preacher who does the rail's office, I:
Whom therefore the flock cast a jealous eye on.
Still, why paint over their door "Mount Zion,"
To which all flesh shall come, saith the prophecy?

V.

But wherefore be harsh on a single case?
After how many modes, this Christmas-Eve,
Does the self-same weary thing take place?
The same endeavor to make you believe,
And with much the same effect, no more:
Each method abundantly convincing,
As I say, to those convinced before,
But scarce to be swallowed without wincing
By the not-as-yet-convinced. For me,
I have my own church equally:
And in this church my faith sprang first!
(I said, as I reached the rising ground,
And the wind began again, with a burst
Of rain in my face, and a glad rebound
From the heart beneath, as if, God speeding me,
I entered his church-door, nature leading me)
— In youth I looked to these very skies,
And probing their immensities,
I found God there, his visible power;
Yet felt in my heart, amid all its sense
Of the power, an equal evidence
That his love, there too, was the nobler dower.
For the loving worm within its clod
Were diviner than a loveless god
Amid his worlds, I will dare to say.
You know what I mean: God 's all, man 's nought:
But also, God, whose pleasure brought
Man into being, stands away
As it were a handbreadth off, to give
Room for the newly-made to live,
And look at him from a place apart,
And use his gifts of brain and heart,
Given, indeed, but to keep forever.
Who speaks of man, then, must not sever
Man's very elements from man,
Saying, "But all is God's" — whose plan
Was to create man and then leave him
Able, his own word saith, to grieve him,

But able to glorify him too,
As a mere machine could never do,
That prayed or praised, all unaware
Of its fitness for aught but praise and prayer,
Made perfect as a thing of course.
Man, therefore, stands on his own stock
Of love and power as a pin-point rock:
And, looking to God who ordained divorce
Of the rock from his boundless continent,
Sees, in his power made evident,
Only excess by a million-fold
O'er the power God gave man in the mould.
For, note: man's hand, first formed to carry
A few pounds' weight, when taught to marry
Its strength with an engine's, lifts a mountain,
— Advancing in power by one degree;
And why count steps through eternity?
But love is the ever-springing fountain:
Man may enlarge or narrow his bed
For the water's play, but the water-head —
How can he multiply or reduce it?
As easy create it, as cause it to cease;
He may profit by it, or abuse it,
But 't is not a thing to bear increase
As power does: be love less or more
In the heart of man, he keeps it shut
Or opes it wide, as he pleases, but
Love's sum remains what it was before.
So, gazing up, in my youth, at love
As seen through power, ever above
All modes which make it manifest,
My soul brought all to a single test —
That he, the Eternal First and Last,
Who, in his power, had so surpassed
All man conceives of what is might, —
Whose wisdom, too, showed infinite,
— Would prove as infinitely good;
Would never, (my soul understood,)
With power to work all love desires,
Bestow e'en less than man requires;
That he who endlessly was teaching,
Above my spirit's utmost reaching,
What love can do in the leaf or stone,
(So that to master this alone,
This done in the stone or leaf for me,
I must go on learning endlessly)

Would never need that I, in turn,
Should point him out defect unheeded,
And show that God had yet to learn
What the meanest human creature needed,
— Not life, to wit, for a few short years,
Tracking his way through doubts and fears,
While the stupid earth on which I stay
Suffers no change, but passive adds
Its myriad years to myriads,
Though I, he gave it to, decay,
Seeing death come and choose about me,
And my dearest ones depart without me.
No: love which, on earth, amid all the shows of it,
Has ever been seen the sole good of life in it,
The love, ever growing there, spite of the strife in it,
Shall arise, made perfect, from death's repose of it.
And I shall behold thee, face to face,
O God, and in thy light retrace
How in all I loved here, still wast thou!
Whom pressing to, then, as I fain would now,
I shall find as able to satiate
The love, thy gift, as my spirit's wonder
Thou art able to quicken and sublimate,
With this sky of thine, that I now walk under,
And glory in thee for, as I gaze
Thus, thus! Oh, let men keep their ways
Of seeking thee in a narrow shrine —
Be this my way! And this is mine!

VI.

For lo, what think you? suddenly
The rain and the wind ceased, and the sky
Received at once the full fruition
Of the moon's consummate apparition.
The black cloud-barricade was riven,
Ruined beneath her feet, and driven
Deep in the West; while, bare and breathless,
North and South and East lay ready
For a glorious thing that, dauntless, deathless,
Sprang across them and stood steady.
'T was a moon-rainbow, vast and perfect,
From heaven to heaven extending, perfect
As the mother-moon's self, full in face.
It rose, distinctly at the base
With its seven proper colors chorded,
Which still, in the rising, were compressed,

Until at last they coalesced,
And supreme the spectral creature lorded
In a triumph of whitest white, —
Above which intervened the night.
But above night too, like only the next,
The second of a wondrous sequence,
Reaching in rare and rarer frequence,
Till the heaven of heavens were circumflexed,
Another rainbow rose, a mightier,
Fainter, flushier and flightier, —
Rapture dying along its verge.
Oh, whose foot shall I see emerge,
Whose, from the straining topmost dark,
On to the keystone of that arc?

VII.

This sight was shown me, there and then, —
Me, one out of a world of men,
Singled forth, as the chance might hap
To another if, in a thunderclap
Where I heard noise and you saw flame,
Some one man knew God called his name.
For me, I think I said, "Appear!
Good were it to be ever here.
If thou wilt, let me build to thee
Service-tabernacles three,
Where, forever in thy presence,
In ecstatic acquiescence,
Far alike from thriftless learning
And ignorance's undiscerning,
I may worship and remain!"
Thus at the show above me, gazing
With upturned eyes, I felt my brain
Glutted with the glory, blazing
Throughout its whole mass, over and under,
Until at length it burst asunder
And out of it bodily there streamed,
The too-much glory, as it seemed,
Passing from out me to the ground,
Then palely serpentining round
Into the dark with mazy error.

VIII.

All at once I looked up with terror.
He was there.
He himself with his human air,

On the narrow pathway, just before.
I saw the back of him, no more —
He had left the chapel, then, as I.
I forgot all about the sky.
No face: only the sight
Of a sweepy garment, vast and white,
With a hem that I could recognize.
I felt terror, no surprise;
My mind filled with the cataract
At one bound of the mighty fact.
"I remember, he did say
Doubtless that, to this world's end,
Where two or three should meet and pray,
He would be in the midst, their friend;
Certainly he was there with them!"
And my pulses leaped for joy
Of the golden thought without alloy,
That I saw his very vesture's hem.
Then rushed the blood back, cold and clear,
With a fresh enhancing shiver of fear;
And I hastened, cried out while I pressed
To the salvation of the vest,
"But not so, Lord! It cannot be
That thou, indeed, art leaving me —
Me, that have despised thy friends!
Did my heart make no amends?
Thou art the love of God — above
His power, didst hear me place his love,
And that was leaving the world for thee.
Therefore thou must not turn from me
As I had chosen the other part!
Folly and pride o'ercame my heart.
Our best is bad, nor bears thy test;
Still, it should be our very best.
I thought it best that thou, the spirit,
Be worshipped in spirit and in truth,
And in beauty, as even we require it —
Not in the forms burlesque, uncouth,
I left but now, as scarcely fitted
For thee: I knew not what I pitied.
But, all I felt there, right or wrong,
What is it to thee, who curest sinning?
Am I not weak as thou art strong?
I have looked to thee from the beginning,
Straight up to thee through all the world
Which, like an idle scroll, lay furled

To nothingness on either side:
And since the time thou wast descried,
Spite of the weak heart, so have I
Lived ever, and so fain would die,
Living and dying, thee before!
But if thou leavest me" —

IX.

Less or more,
I suppose that I spoke thus.
When, — have mercy, Lord, on us!
The whole face turned upon me full.
And I spread myself beneath it,
As when the bleacher spreads, to seethe it
In the cleansing sun, his wool, —
Steeps in the flood of noontide whiteness
Some defiled, discolored web —
So lay I, saturate with brightness.
And when the flood appeared to ebb,
Lo, I was walking, light and swift,
With my senses settling fast and steadying,
But my body caught up in the whirl and drift
Of the vesture's amplitude, still eddying
On, just before me, still to be followed,
As it carried me after with its motion:
What shall I say? — as a path were hollowed
And a man went weltering through the ocean,
Sucked along in the flying wake
Of the luminous water-snake.
Darkness and cold were cloven, as through
I passed, upborne yet walking too.
And I turned to myself at intervals, —
"So he said, so it befalls.
God who registers the cup
Of mere cold water, for his sake
To a disciple rendered up,
Disdains not his own thirst to slake
At the poorest love was ever offered:
And because my heart I proffered,
With true love trembling at the brim,
He suffers me to follow him
Forever, my own way, — dispensed
From seeking to be influenced
By all the less immediate ways
That earth, in worships manifold,
Adopts to reach, by prayer and praise,
The garment's hem, which, lo, I hold!"

X.

And so we crossed the world and stopped.
For where am I, in city or plain,
Since I am 'ware of the world again?
And what is this that rises propped
With pillars of prodigious girth?
Is it really on the earth,
This miraculous Dome of God?
Has the angel's measuring-rod
Which numbered cubits, gem from gem,
'Twixt the gates of the New Jerusalem,
Meted it out, — and what he meted,
Have the sons of men completed?
— Binding, ever as he bade,
Columns in the colonnade
With arms wide open to embrace
The entry of the human race
To the breast of . . . what is it, yon building,
Ablaze in front, all paint and gilding,
With marble for brick, and stones of price
For garniture of the edifice?
Now I see; it is no dream;
It stands there and it does not seem:
Forever, in pictures, thus it looks,
And thus I have read of it in books
Often in England, leagues away,
And wondered how these fountains play,
Growing up eternally
Each to a musical water-tree,
Whose blossoms drop, a glittering boon,
Before my eyes, in the light of the moon,
To the granite lavers underneath.
Liar and dreamer in your teeth!
I, the sinner that speak to you,
Was in Rome this night, and stood, and knew
Both this and more. For see, for see,
The dark is rent, mine eye is free
To pierce the crust of the outer wall,
And I view inside, and all there, all,
As the swarming hollow of a hive,
The whole Basilica alive!
Men in the chancel, body and nave,
Men on the pillars' architrave,
Men on the statues, men on the tombs
With popes and kings in their porphyry wombs,

All famishing in expectation
Of the main-altar's consummation.
For see, for see, the rapturous moment
Approaches, and earth's best endowment
Blends with heaven's; the taper-fires
Pant up, the winding brazen spires
Heave loftier yet the baldachin;
The incense-gaspings, long kept in,
Suspire in clouds; the organ blatant
Holds his breath and grovels latent,
As if God's hushing finger grazed him,
(Like Behemoth when he praised him)
At the silver bell's shrill tinkling,
Quick cold drops of terror sprinkling
On the sudden pavement strewed
With faces of the multitude.
Earth breaks up, time drops away,
In flows heaven, with its new day
Of endless life, when He who trod,
Very man and very God,
This earth in weakness, shame and pain,
Dying the death whose signs remain
Up yonder on the accursed tree, —
Shall come again, no more to be
Of captivity the thrall,
But the one God, All in all,
King of kings, Lord of lords,
As His servant John received the words,
"I died, and live forevermore!"

XI.

Yet I was left outside the door.
"Why sit I here on the threshold-stone,
Left till He return, alone
Save for the garment's extreme fold
Abandoned still to bless my hold?"
My reason, to my doubt, replied,
As if a book were opened wide,
And at a certain page I traced
Every record undefaced,
Added by successive years, —
The harvestings of truth's stray ears
Singly gleaned, and in one sheaf
Bound together for belief.
Yes, I said — that he will go
And sit with these in turn, I know.

Their faith's heart beats, though her head swims
Too giddily to guide her limbs,
Disabled by their palsy-stroke
From propping mine. Though Rome's gross yoke
Drops off, no more to be endured,
Her teaching is not so obscured
By errors and perversities,
That no truth shines athwart the lies:
And he, whose eye detects a spark
Even where, to man's, the whole seems dark,
May well see flame where each beholder
Acknowledges the embers smoulder.
But I, a mere man, fear to quit
The clue God gave me as most fit
To guide my footsteps through life's maze,
Because himself discerns all ways
Open to reach him: I, a man
Able to mark where faith began
To swerve aside, till from its summit
Judgment drops her damning plummet,
Pronouncing such a fatal space
Departed from the founder's base:
He will not bid me enter too,
But rather sit, as now I do,
Awaiting his return outside.
—'T was thus my reason straight replied
And joyously I turned, and pressed
The garment's skirt upon my breast,
Until, afresh its light suffusing me,
My heart cried — "What has been abusing me
That I should wait here lonely and coldly,
Instead of rising, entering boldly,
Baring truth's face, and letting drift
Her veils of lies as they choose to shift?
Do these men praise him? I will raise
My voice up to their point of praise!
I see the error; but above
The scope of error, see the love. —
Oh, love of those first Christian days!
— Fanned so soon into a blaze,
From the spark preserved by the trampled sect,
That the antique sovereign Intellect
Which then sat ruling in the world,
Like a change in dreams, was hurled
From the throne he reigned upon:
You looked up and he was gone.

Gone, his glory of the pen!
— Love, with Greece and Rome in ken,
Bade her scribes abhor the trick
Of poetry and rhetoric,
And exult with hearts set free,
In blessed imbecility
Scrawled, perchance, on some torn sheet
Leaving Sallust incomplete.
Gone, his pride of sculptor, painter!
— Love, while able to acquaint her
While the thousand statues yet
Fresh from chisel, pictures wet
From brush, she saw on every side,
Chose rather with an infant's pride
To frame those portents which impart
Such unction to true Christian Art.
Gone, music too! The air was stirred
By happy wings: Terpander's bird
(That, when the cold came, fled away)
Would tarry not the wintry day, —
As more-enduring sculpture must,
Till filthy saints rebuked the gust
With which they chanced to get a sight
Of some dear naked Aphrodite
They glanced a thought above the toes of,
By breaking zealously her nose off.
Love, surely, from that music's lingering,
Might have filched her organ-fingering,
Nor chosen rather to set prayings
To hog-grunts, praises to horse-neighings.
Love was the startling thing, the new:
Love was the all-sufficient too;
And seeing that, you see the rest:
As a babe can find its mother's breast
As well in darkness as in light,
Love shut our eyes, and all seemed right.
True, the world's eyes are open now:
— Less need for me to disallow
Some few that keep Love's zone unbuckled,
Peevish as ever to be suckled,
Lulled by the same old baby-prattle
With intermixture of the rattle,
When she would have them creep, stand steady
Upon their feet, or walk already,
Not to speak of trying to climb.
I will be wise another time,

And not desire a wall between us,
When next I see a church-roof cover
So many species of one genus,
All with foreheads bearing *lover*
Written above the earnest eyes of them;
All with breasts that beat for beauty,
Whether sublimed, to the surprise of them,
In noble daring, steadfast duty,
The heroic in passion, or in action, —
Or, lowered for sense's satisfaction,
To the mere outside of human creatures,
Mere perfect form and faultless features.
What? with all Rome here, whence to levy
Such contributions to their appetite,
With women and men in a gorgeous bevy,
They take, as it were, a padlock, clap it tight
On their southern eyes, restrained from feeding
On the glories of their ancient reading,
On the beauties of their modern singing,
On the wonders of the builder's bringing,
On the majesties of Art around them, —
And, all these loves, late struggling incessant,
When faith has at last united and bound them,
They offer up to God for a present?
Why, I will, on the whole, be rather proud of it, —
And, only taking the act in reference
To the other recipients who might have allowed it,
I will rejoice that God had the preference."

XII.

So I summed up my new resolves:
Too much love there can never be.
And where the intellect devolves
Its function on love exclusively,
I, a man who possesses both,
Will accept the provision, nothing loth,
— Will feast my love, then depart elsewhere,
That my intellect may find its share.
And ponder, O soul, the while thou departest,
And see thou applaud the great heart of the artist,
Who, examining the capabilities
Of the block of marble he has to fashion
Into a type of thought or passion, —
Not always, using obvious facilities,
Shapes it, as any artist can,
Into a perfect symmetrical man,

Complete from head to foot of the life-size,
Such as old Adam stood in his wife's eyes, —
But, now and then, bravely aspires to consummate
A Colossus by no means so easy to come at,
And uses the whole of his block for the bust,
Leaving the mind of the public to finish it,
Since cut it ruefully short he must:
On the face alone he expends his devotion,
He rather would mar than resolve to diminish it,
— Saying, "Applaud me for this grand notion
Of what a face may be! As for completing it
In breast and body and limbs, do that, you!"
All hail! I fancy how, happily meeting it,
A trunk and legs would perfect the statue,
Could man carve so as to answer volition.
And how much nobler than petty cavils,
Were a hope to find, in my spirit-travels,
Some artist of another ambition,
Who having a block to carve, no bigger,
Has spent his power on the opposite quest,
And believed to begin at the feet was best —
For so may I see, ere I die, the whole figure!

XIII.

No sooner said than out in the night!
My heart beat lighter and more light:
And still, as before, I was walking swift,
With my senses settling fast and steadying,
But my body caught up in the whirl and drift
Of the vesture's amplitude, still eddying
On just before me, still to be followed,
As it carried me after with its motion,
— What shall I say? — as a path were hollowed,
And a man went weltering through the ocean,
Sucked along in the flying wake
Of the luminous water-snake.

XIV.

Alone! I am left alone once more —
(Save for the garment's extreme fold
Abandoned still to bless my hold)
Alone, beside the entrance-door
Of a sort of temple, — perhaps a college,
— Like nothing I ever saw before
At home in England, to my knowledge.
The tall old quaint irregular town!

It may be . . . though which, I can't affirm . . . any
Of the famous middle-age towns of Germany;
And this flight of stairs where I sit down,
Is it Halle, Weimar, Cassel, Frankfort,
Or Göttingen, I have to thank for 't?
It may be Göttingen, — most likely.
Through the open door I catch obliquely
Glimpses of a lecture-hall;
And not a bad assembly neither,
Ranged decent and symmetrical
On benches, waiting what 's to see there;
Which, holding still by the vesture's hem,
I also resolve to see with them,
Cautious this time how I suffer to slip
The chance of joining in fellowship
With any that call themselves his friends;
As these folks do, I have a notion.
But hist — a buzzing and emotion!
All settle themselves, the while ascends
By the creaking rail to the lecture-desk,
Step by step, deliberate
Because of his cranium's over-freight,
Three parts sublime to one grotesque,
If I have proved an accurate guesser,
The hawk-nosed, high-cheekboned Professor.
I felt at once as if there ran
A shoot of love from my heart to the man —
That sallow virgin-minded studious
Martyr to mild enthusiasm,
As he uttered a kind of cough-preludious
That woke my sympathetic spasm,
(Beside some spitting that made me sorry)
And stood, surveying his auditory
With a wan pure look, wellnigh celestial, —
Those blue eyes had survived so much!
While, under the foot they could not smutch,
Lay all the fleshly and the bestial.
Over he bowed, and arranged his notes,
Till the auditory's clearing of throats
Was done with, died into a silence;
And, when each glance was upward sent,
Each bearded mouth composed intent,
And a pin might be heard drop half a mile hence, —
He pushed back higher his spectacles,
Let the eyes stream out like lamps from cells,
And giving his head of hair — a hake

Of undressed tow, for color and quantity —
One rapid and impatient shake,
(As our own young England adjusts a jaunty tie
When about to impart, on mature digestion,
Some thrilling view of the surplice-question)
— The Professor's grave voice, sweet though hoarse,
Broke into his Christmas-Eve discourse.

XV.

And he began it by observing
How reason dictated that men
Should rectify the natural swerving,
By a reversion, now and then,
To the well-heads of knowledge, few
And far away, whence rolling grew
The life-stream wide whereat we drink,
Commingled, as we needs must think,
With waters alien to the source;
To do which, aimed this eve's discourse;
Since, where could be a fitter time
For tracing backward to its prime,
This Christianity, this lake,
This reservoir, whereat we slake,
From one or other bank, our thirst?
So, he proposed inquiring first
Into the various sources whence
This Myth of Christ is derivable;
Demanding from the evidence,
(Since plainly no such life was livable)
How these phenomena should class?
Whether 't were best opine Christ was,
Or never was at all, or whether
He was and was not, both together —
It matters little for the name,
So the idea be left the same.
Only, for practical purpose' sake,
'T was obviously as well to take
The popular story, — understanding
How the ineptitude of the time,
And the penman's prejudice, expanding
Fact into fable fit for the clime,
Had, by slow and sure degrees, translated it
Into this myth, this Individuum, —
Which, when reason had strained and abated it
Of foreign matter, left, for residuum,
A Man! — a right true man, however,

Whose work was worthy a man's endeavor:
Work, that gave warrant almost sufficient
To his disciples, for rather believing
He was just omnipotent and omniscient,
As it gives to us, for as frankly receiving
His word, their tradition, — which, though it meant
Something entirely different
From all that those who only heard it,
In their simplicity thought and averred it,
Had yet a meaning quite as respectable:
For, among other doctrines delectable,
Was he not surely the first to insist on
The natural sovereignty of our race? —
Here the lecturer came to a pausing-place.
And while his cough, like a droughty piston,
Tried to dislodge the husk that grew to him,
I seized the occasion of bidding adieu to him,
The vesture still within my hand.

XVI.

I could interpret its command.
This time he would not bid me enter
The exhausted air-bell of the Critic.
Truth's atmosphere may grow mephitic
When Papist struggles with Dissenter,
Impregnating its pristine clarity,
— One, by his daily fare's vulgarity,
Its gust of broken meat and garlic;
— One, by his soul's too-much presuming
To turn the frankincense's fuming
And vapors of the candle starlike
Into the cloud her wings she buoys on.
Each, that thus sets the pure air seething,
May poison it for healthy breathing —
But the Critic leaves no air to poison;
Pumps out with ruthless ingenuity
Atom by atom, and leaves you — vacuity.
Thus much of Christ does he reject?
And what retain? His intellect?
What is it I must reverence duly?
Poor intellect for worship, truly,
Which tells me simply what was told
(If mere morality, bereft
Of the God in Christ, be all that 's left)
Elsewhere by voices manifold;
With this advantage, that the stater

Made nowise the important stumble
Of adding, he, the sage and humble,
Was also one with the Creator.
You urge Christ's followers' simplicity:
But how does shifting blame evade it?
Have wisdom's words no more felicity?
The stumbling-block, his speech — who laid it?
How comes it that for one found able
To sift the truth of it from fable,
Millions believe it to the letter?
Christ's goodness, then — does that fare better?
Strange goodness, which upon the score
Of being goodness, the mere due
Of man to fellow-man, much more
To God — should take another view
Of its possessor's privilege,
And bid him rule his race! You pledge
Your fealty to such rule? What, all —
From heavenly John and Attic Paul,
And that brave weather-battered Peter,
Whose stout faith only stood completer
For buffets, sinning to be pardoned,
As, more his hands hauled nets, they hardened, —
All, down to you, the man of men,
Professing here at Göttingen,
Compose Christ's flock! They, you and I,
Are sheep of a good man! And why?
The goodness, — how did he acquire it?
Was it self-gained, did God inspire it?
Choose which; then tell me, on what ground
Should its possessor dare propound
His claim to rise o'er us an inch?
Were goodness all some man's invention,
Who arbitrarily made mention
What we should follow, and whence flinch, —
What qualities might take the style
Of right and wrong, — and had such guessing
Met with as general acquiescing
As graced the alphabet erewhile,
When A got leave an Ox to be,
No Camel (quoth the Jews) like G, —
For thus inventing thing and title
Worship were that man's fit requital.
But if the common conscience must
Be ultimately judge, adjust
Its apt name to each quality

Already known, — I would decree
Worship for such mere demonstration
And simple work of nomenclature,
Only the day I praised, not nature,
But Harvey, for the circulation.
I would praise such a Christ, with pride
And joy, that he, as none beside,
Had taught us how to keep the mind
God gave him, as God gave his kind,
Freer than they from fleshly taint:
I would call such a Christ our Saint,
As I declare our Poet, him
Whose insight makes all others dim:
A thousand poets pried at life,
And only one amid the strife
Rose to be Shakespeare: each shall take
His crown, I 'd say, for the world's sake —
Though some objected — "Had we seen
The heart and head of each, what screen
Was broken there to give them light,
While in ourselves it shuts the sight,
We should no more admire, perchance,
That these found truth out at a glance,
Than marvel how the bat discerns
Some pitch-dark cavern's fifty turns,
Led by a finer tact, a gift
He boasts, which other birds must shift
Without, and grope as best they can."
No, freely I would praise the man, —
Nor one whit more, if he contended
That gift of his from God descended.
Ah friend, what gift of man's does not?
No nearer something, by a jot,
Rise an infinity of nothings
Than one: take Euclid for your teacher:
Distinguish kinds: do crownings, clothings,
Make that creator which was creature?
Multiply gifts upon man's head,
And what, when all 's done, shall be said
But — the more gifted he, I ween!
That one 's made Christ, this other, Pilate,
And this might be all that has been, —
So what is there to frown or smile at?
What is left for us, save, in growth
Of soul, to rise up, far past both,
From the gift looking to the giver,

And from the cistern to the river,
And from the finite to infinity,
And from man's dust to God's divinity?

XVII.

Take all in a word: the truth in God's breast
Lies trace for trace upon ours impressed:
Though he is so bright and we so dim,
We are made in his image to witness him:
And were no eye in us to tell,
Instructed by no inner sense,
The light of heaven from the dark of hell,
That light would want its evidence, —
Though justice, good and truth were still
Divine, if, by some demon's will,
Hatred and wrong had been proclaimed
Law through the worlds, and right misnamed.
No mere exposition of morality
Made or in part or in totality,
Should win you to give it worship, therefore:
And, if no better proof you will care for,
— Whom do you count the worst man upon earth?
Be sure, he knows, in his conscience, more
Of what right is, than arrives at birth
In the best man's acts that we bow before:
This last knows better — true, but my fact is,
'T is one thing to know, and another to practise.
And thence I conclude that the real God-function
Is to furnish a motive and injunction
For practising what we know already.
And such an injunction and such a motive
As the God in Christ, do you waive, and "heady,
High-minded," hang your tablet-votive
Outside the fane on a finger-post?
Morality to the uttermost,
Supreme in Christ as we all confess,
Why need we prove would avail no jot
To make him God, if God he were not?
What is the point where himself lays stress?
Does the precept run "Believe in good,
In justice, truth, now understood
For the first time"? — or, "Believe in me,
Who lived and died, yet essentially
Am Lord of Life"? Whoever can take
The same to his heart and for mere love's sake
Conceive of the love, — that man obtains

A new truth; no conviction gains
Of an old one only, made intense
By a fresh appeal to his faded sense.

XVIII.

Can it be that he stays inside?
Is the vesture left me to commune with?
Could my soul find aught to sing in tune with
Even at this lecture, if she tried?
Oh, let me at lowest sympathize
With the lurking drop of blood that lies
In the desiccated brain's white roots
Without throb for Christ's attributes,
As the lecturer makes his special boast!
If love 's dead there, it has left a ghost.
Admire we, how from heart to brain
(Though to say so strike the doctors dumb)
One instinct rises and falls again,
Restoring the equilibrium.
And how when the Critic had done his best,
And the pearl of price, at reason's test,
Lay dust and ashes levigable
On the Professor's lecture-table, —
When we looked for the inference and monition
That our faith, reduced to such condition,
Be swept forthwith to its natural dust-hole, —
He bids us, when we least expect it,
Take back our faith, — if it be not just whole,
Yet a pearl indeed, as his tests affect it,
Which fact pays damage done rewardingly,
So, prize we our dust and ashes accordingly!
'Go home and venerate the myth
I thus have experimented with —
This man, continue to adore him
Rather than all who went before him,
And all who ever followed after!" —
Surely for this I may praise you, my brother!
Will you take the praise in tears or laughter?
That 's one point gained: can I compass another?
Unlearned love was safe from spurning —
Can't we respect your loveless learning?
Let us at least give learning honor!
What laurels had we showered upon her,
Girding her loins up to perturb
Our theory of the Middle Verb;
Or Turk-like brandishing a scimitar

O'er anapæsts in comic-trimeter;
Or curing the halt and maimed "Iketides,"
While we lounged on at our indebted ease:
Instead of which, a tricksy demon
Sets her at Titus or Philemon!
When ignorance wags his ears of leather
And hates God's word, 't is altogether;
Nor leaves he his congenial thistles
To go and browse on Paul's Epistles.
— And you, the audience, who might ravage
The world wide, enviably savage,
Nor heed the cry of the retriever,
More than Herr Heine (before his fever), —
I do not tell a lie so arrant
As say my passion's wings are furled up,
And, without plainest heavenly warrant,
I were ready and glad to give the world up —
But still, when you rub brow meticulous,
And ponder the profit of turning holy
If not for God's, for your own sake solely,
— God forbid I should find you ridiculous!
Deduce from this lecture all that eases you,
Nay, call yourselves, if the calling pleases you,
'Christians," — abhor the deist's pravity, —
Go on, you shall no more move my gravity
Than, when I see boys ride a-cockhorse,
I find it in my heart to embarrass them
By hinting that their stick 's a mock horse,
And they really carry what they say carries them.

XIX.

So sat I talking with my mind.
I did not long to leave the door
And find a new church, as before,
But rather was quiet and inclined
To prolong and enjoy the gentle resting
From further tracking and trying and testing.
"This tolerance is a genial mood!"
(Said I, and a little pause ensued.)
"One trims the bark 'twixt shoal and shelf,
And sees, each side, the good effects of it,
A value for religion's self,
A carelessness about the sects of it.
Let me enjoy my own conviction,
Not watch my neighbor's faith with fretfulness,
Still spying there some dereliction

Of truth, perversity, forgetfulness!
Better a mild indifferentism,
Teaching that both our faiths (though duller
His shine through a dull spirit's prism)
Originally had one color!
Better pursue a pilgrimage
Through ancient and through modern times
To many peoples, various climes,
Where I may see saint, savage, sage
Fuse their respective creeds in one
Before the general Father's throne!"

XX.

—'T was the horrible storm began afresh!
The black night caught me in his mesh,
Whirled me up, and flung me prone.
I was left on the college-step alone.
I looked, and far there, ever fleeting
Far, far away, the receding gesture,
And looming of the lessening vesture! —
Swept forward from my stupid hand,
While I watched my foolish heart expand
In the lazy glow of benevolence,
O'er the various modes of man's belief.
I sprang up with fear's vehemence.
Needs must there be one way, our chief
Best way of worship: let me strive
To find it, and when found, contrive
My fellows also take their share!
This constitutes my earthly care:
God's is above it and distinct.
For I, a man, with men am linked
And not a brute with brutes; no gain
That I experience, must remain
Unshared: but should my best endeavor
To share it, fail — subsisteth ever
God's care above, and I exult
That God, by God's own ways occult,
May — doth, I will believe — bring back
All wanderers to a single track.
Meantime, I can but testify
God's care for me — no more, can I —
It is but for myself I know;
The world rolls witnessing around me
Only to leave me as it found me;
Men cry there, but my ear is slow:

Their races flourish or decay
— What boots it, while yon lucid way
Loaded with stars divides the vault?
But soon my soul repairs its fault
When, sharpening sense's hebetude,
She turns on my own life! So viewed,
No mere mote's-breadth but teems immense
With witnessings of providence:
And woe to me if when I look
Upon that record, the sole book
Unsealed to me, I take no heed
Of any warning that I read!
Have I been sure, this Christmas-Eve,
God's own hand did the rainbow weave,
Whereby the truth from heaven slid
Into my soul? — I cannot bid
The world admit he stooped to heal
My soul, as if in a thunder-peal
Where one heard noise, and one saw flame,
I only knew he named my name:
But what is the world to me, for sorrow
Or joy in its censure, when to-morrow
It drops the remark, with just-turned head,
Then, on again, "That man is dead"?
Yes, but for me — my name called, — drawn
As a conscript's lot from the lap's black yawn,
He has dipt into on a battle-dawn:
Bid out of life by a nod, a glance, —
Stumbling, mute-mazed, at nature's chance, —
With a rapid finger circled round,
Fixed to the first poor inch of ground
To fight from, where his foot was found;
Whose ear but a minute since lay free
To the wide camp's buzz and gossipry —
Summoned, a solitary man,
To end his life where his life began,
From the safe glad rear, to the dreadful van!
Soul of mine, hadst thou caught and held
By the hem of the vesture! —

XXI.

And I caught
At the flying robe, and unrepelled
Was lapped again in its folds full-fraught
With warmth and wonder and delight,
God's mercy being infinite.

For scarce had the words escaped my tongue,
When, at a passionate bound, I sprung
Out of the wandering world of rain,
Into the little chapel again.

XXII.

How else was I found there, bolt upright
On my bench, as if I had never left it?
— Never flung out on the common at night,
Nor met the storm and wedge-like cleft it,
Seen the raree-show of Peter's successor,
Or the laboratory of the Professor!
For the Vision, that was true, I wist,
True as that heaven and earth exist.
There sat my friend, the yellow and tall,
With his neck and its wen in the selfsame place;
Yet my nearest neighbor's cheek showed gall.
She had slid away a contemptuous space:
And the old fat woman, late so placable,
Eyed me with symptoms, hardly mistakable,
Of her milk of kindness turning rancid.
In short, a spectator might have fancied
That I had nodded, betrayed by slumber,
Yet kept my seat, a warning ghastly,
Through the heads of the sermon, nine in number,
And woke up now at the tenth and lastly.
But again, could such disgrace have happened?
Each friend at my elbow had surely nudged it;
And, as for the sermon, where did my nap end?
Unless I heard it, could I have judged it?
Could I report as I do at the close,
First, the preacher speaks through his nose:
Second, his gesture is too emphatic:
Thirdly, to waive what 's pedagogic,
The subject-matter itself lacks logic:
Fourthly, the English is ungrammatic.
Great news! the preacher is found no Pascal,
Whom, if I pleased, I might to the task call
Of making square to a finite eye
The circle of infinity,
And find so all-but-just-succeeding!
Great news! the sermon proves no reading
Where bee-like in the flowers I bury me,
Like Taylor's, the immortal Jeremy!
And now that I know the very worst of him,
What was it I thought to obtain at first of him?

Ha! Is God mocked, as he asks?
Shall I take on me to change his tasks,
And dare, dispatched to a river-head
For a simple draught of the element,
Neglect the thing for which he sent,
And return with another thing instead? —
Saying, "Because the water found
Welling up from underground,
Is mingled with the taints of earth,
While thou, I know, dost laugh at dearth,
And couldst, at wink or word, convulse
The world with the leap of a river-pulse, —
Therefore I turned from the oozings muddy,
And bring thee a chalice I found, instead:
See the brave veins in the breccia ruddy!
One would suppose that the marble bled.
What matters the water? A hope I have nursed
The waterless cup will quench my thirst."
— Better have knelt at the poorest stream
That trickles in pain from the straitest rift!
For the less or the more is all God's gift,
Who blocks up or breaks wide the granite-seam.
And here, is there water or not, to drink?
I then, in ignorance and weakness,
Taking God's help, have attained to think
My heart does best to receive in meekness
That mode of worship, as most to his mind,
Where earthly aids being cast behind,
His All in All appears serene
With the thinnest human veil between,
Letting the mystic lamps, the seven,
The many motions of his spirit,
Pass, as they list, to earth from heaven.
For the preacher's merit or demerit,
It were to be wished the flaws were fewer
In the earthen vessel, holding treasure
Which lies as safe in a golden ewer;
But the main thing is, does it hold good measure?
Heaven soon sets right all other matters! —
Ask, else, these ruins of humanity,
This flesh worn out to rags and tatters,
This soul at struggle with insanity,
Who thence take comfort — can I doubt? —
Which an empire gained, were a loss without.
May it be mine! And let us hope
That no worse blessing befall the Pope,

Turn'd sick at last of to-day's buffoonery,
Of posturings and petticoatings,
Beside his Bourbon bully's gloatings
In the bloody orgies of drunk poltroonery!
Nor may the Professor forego its peace
At Göttingen presently, when, in the dusk
Of his life, if his cough, as I fear, should increase,
Prophesied of by that horrible husk —
When thicker and thicker the darkness fills
The world through his misty spectacles, —
And he gropes for something more substantial
Than a fable, myth or personification, —
May Christ do for him what no mere man shall,
And stand confessed as the God of salvation!
Meantime, in the still recurring fear
Lest myself, at unawares, be found,
While attacking the choice of my neighbors round,
With none of my own made — I choose here!
The giving out of the hymn reclaims me;
I have done: and if any blames me,
Thinking that merely to touch in brevity
The topics I dwell on, were unlawful, —
Or worse, that I trench, with undue levity,
On the bounds of the holy and the awful, —
I praise the heart, and pity the head of him,
And refer myself to THEE, instead of him,
Who head and heart alike discernest,
Looking below light speech we utter,
When frothy spume and frequent sputter
Prove that the soul's depths boil in earnest!
May truth shine out, stand ever before us!
I put up pencil and join chorus
To Hepzibah Tune, without further apology,
The last five verses of the third section
Of the seventeenth hymn of Whitfield's Collection,
To conclude with the doxology.

EASTER-DAY.

I.

How very hard it is to be
A Christian! Hard for you and me,
— Not the mere task of making real
That duty up to its ideal,
Effecting thus, complete and whole,

A purpose of the human soul —
For that is always hard to do;
But hard, I mean, for me and you
To realize it, more or less,
With even the moderate success
Which commonly repays our strife
To carry out the aims of life.
"This aim is greater," you will say,
"And so more arduous every way."
— But the importance of their fruits
Still proves to man, in all pursuits,
Proportional encouragement.
"Then, what if it be God's intent
That labor to this one result
Should seem unduly difficult?"
Ah, that 's a question in the dark —
And the sole thing that I remark
Upon the difficulty, this:
We do not see it where it is,
At the beginning of the race:
As we proceed, it shifts its place,
And where we looked for crowns to fall,
We find the tug 's to come, — that 's all.

II.

At first you say, "The whole, or chief
Of difficulties, is belief.
Could I believe once thoroughly,
The rest were simple. What? Am I
An idiot, do you think, — a beast?
Prove to me, only that the least
Command of God is God's indeed,
And what injunction shall I need
To pay obedience? Death so nigh,
When time must end, eternity
Begin, — and cannot I compute,
Weigh loss and gain together, suit
My actions to the balance drawn,
And give my body to be sawn
Asunder, hacked in pieces, tied
To horses, stoned, burned, crucified,
Like any martyr of the list?
How gladly! — if I make acquist,
Through the brief minute's fierce annoy,
Of God's eternity of joy."

III.

— And certainly you name the point
Whereon all turns: for could you joint
This flexile finite life once tight
Into the fixed and infinite,
You, safe inside, would spurn what's out,
With carelessness enough, no doubt —
Would spurn mere life: but when time brings
To their next stage your reasonings,
Your eyes, late wide, begin to wink
Nor see the path so well, I think.

IV.

You say, "Faith may be, one agrees,
A touchstone for God's purposes,
Even as ourselves conceive of them.
Could he acquit us or condemn
For holding what no hand can loose,
Rejecting when we can't but choose?
As well award the victor's wreath
To whosoever should take breath
Duly each minute while he lived —
Grant heaven, because a man contrived
To see its sunlight every day
He walked forth on the public way.
You must mix some uncertainty
With faith, if you would have faith be.
Why, what but faith, do we abhor
And idolize each other for —
Faith in our evil or our good,
Which is or is not understood
Aright by those we love or those
We hate, thence called our friends or foes?
Your mistress saw your spirit's grace,
When, turning from the ugly face,
I found belief in it too hard;
And she and I have our reward.
— Yet here a doubt peeps: well for us
Weak beings, to go using thus
A touchstone for our little ends,
Trying with faith the foes and friends;
— But God, bethink you! I would fain
Conceive of the Creator's reign
As based upon exacter laws
Than creatures build by with applause.

In all God's acts — (as Plato cries
He doth) — he should geometrize.
Whence, I desiderate" . . .

V.

I see!
You would grow as a natural tree,
Stand as a rock, soar up like fire.
The world 's so perfect and entire,
Quite above faith, so right and fit!
Go there, walk up and down in it!
No. The creation travails, groans —
Contrive your music from its moans,
Without or let or hindrance, friend!
That 's an old story, and its end
As old — you come back (be sincere)
With every question you put here
(Here where there once was, and is still,
We think, a living oracle,
Whose answers you stand carping at)
This time flung back unanswered flat, —
Beside, perhaps, as many more
As those that drove you out before,
Now added, where was little need.
Questions impossible, indeed,
To us who sat still, all and each
Persuaded that our earth had speech,
Of God's, writ down, no matter if
In cursive type or hieroglyph, —
Which one fact freed us from the yoke
Of guessing why He never spoke.
You come back in no better plight
Than when you left us, — am I right?

VI.

So, the old process, I conclude,
Goes on, the reasoning 's pursued
Further. You own, " 'T is well averred,
A scientific faith 's absurd,
— Frustrates the very end 't was meant
To serve. So, I would rest content
With a mere probability,
But, probable; the chance must lie
Clear on one side, — lie all in rough,
So long as there be just enough
To pin my faith to, though it hap

Only at points: from gap to gap
One hangs up a huge curtain so,
Grandly, nor seeks to have it go
Foldless and flat along the wall.
What care I if some interval
Of life less plainly may depend
On God? I 'd hang there to the end;
And thus I should not find it hard
To be a Christian and debarred
From trailing on the earth, till furled
Away by death. — Renounce the world!
Were that a mighty hardship? Plan
A pleasant life, and straight some man
Beside you, with, if he thought fit,
Abundant means to compass it,
Shall turn deliberate aside
To try and live as, if you tried
You clearly might, yet most despise.
One friend of mine wears out his eyes,
Slighting the stupid joys of sense,
In patient hope that, ten years hence,
'Somewhat completer,' he may say,
'My list of *coleoptera!*'
While just the other who most laughs
At him, above all epitaphs
Aspires to have his tomb describe
Himself as sole among the tribe
Of snuffbox-fanciers, who possessed
A Grignon with the Regent's crest.
So that, subduing, as you want,
Whatever stands predominant
Among my earthly appetites
For tastes and smells and sounds and sights,
I shall be doing that alone,
To gain a palm-branch and a throne,
Which fifty people undertake
To do, and gladly, for the sake
Of giving a Semitic guess,
Or playing pawns at blindfold chess."

VII.

Good: and the next thing is, — look round
For evidence enough! 'T is found,
No doubt: as is your sort of mind,
So is your sort of search: you 'll find
What you desire, and that 's to be

A Christian. What says history?
How comforting a point it were
To find some mummy-scrap declare
There lived a Moses! Better still,
Prove Jonah's whale translatable
Into some quicksand of the seas,
Isle, cavern, rock, or what you please,
That faith might flap her wings and crow
From such an eminence! Or, no —
The human heart 's best; you prefer
Making that prove the minister
To truth; you probe its wants and needs,
And hopes and fears, then try what creeds
Meet these most aptly, — resolute
That faith plucks such substantial fruit
Wherever these two correspond,
She little needs to look beyond,
And puzzle out who Orpheus was,
Or Dionysius Zagrias.
You 'll find sufficient, as I say,
To satisfy you either way;
You wanted to believe; your pains
Are crowned — you do: and what remains?
"Renounce the world!" — Ah, were it done
By merely cutting one by one
Your limbs off, with your wise head last,
How easy were it! — how soon past,
If once in the believing mood!
"Such is man's usual gratitude,
Such thanks to God do we return,
For not exacting that we spurn
A single gift of life, forego
One real gain, — only taste them so
With gravity and temperance,
That those mild virtues may enhance
Such pleasures, rather than abstract —
Last spice of which, will be the fact
Of love discerned in every gift;
While, when the scene of life shall shift,
And the gay heart be taught to ache,
As sorrows and privations take
The place of joy, — the thing that seems
Mere misery, under human schemes,
Becomes, regarded by the light
Of love, as very near or quite
As good a gift as joy before.

So plain is it that, all the more
A dispensation 's merciful,
More pettishly we try and cull
Briers, thistles, from our private plot,
To mar God's ground where thorns are not!"

VIII.

Do you say this, or I? — Oh, you!
Then, what, my friend? — (thus I pursue
Our parley) — you indeed opine
That the Eternal and Divine
Did, eighteen centuries ago,
In very truth . . . Enough! you know
The all-stupendous tale, — that Birth,
That Life, that Death! And all, the earth
Shuddered at, — all, the heavens grew black
Rather than see; all, nature's rack
And throe at dissolution's brink
Attested, — all took place, you think,
Only to give our joys a zest,
And prove our sorrows for the best?
We differ, then! Were I, still pale
And heartstruck at the dreadful tale,
Waiting to hear God's voice declare
What horror followed for my share,
As implicated in the deed,
Apart from other sins, — concede
That if He blacked out in a blot
My brief life's pleasantness, 't were not
So very disproportionate!
Or there might be another fate —
I certainly could understand
(If fancies were the thing in hand)
How God might save, at that day's price,
The impure in their impurities,
Give license formal and complete
To choose the fair and pick the sweet.
But there be certain words, broad, plain,
Uttered again and yet again,
Hard to mistake or overgloss —
Announcing this world's gain for loss,
And bidding us reject the same:
The whole world lieth (they proclaim)
In wickedness, — come out of it!
Turn a deaf ear, if you think fit,
But I who thrill through every nerve

At thought of what deaf ears deserve —
How do you counsel in the case?

IX.

"I'd take, by all means, in your place,
The safe side, since it so appears:
Deny myself, a few brief years,
The natural pleasure, leave the fruit
Or cut the plant up by the root.
Remember what a martyr said
On the rude tablet overhead!
'I was born sickly, poor and mean,
A slave: no misery could screen
The holders of the pearl of price
From Cæsar's envy; therefore twice
I fought with beasts, and three times saw
My children suffer by his law;
At last my own release was earned:
I was some time in being burned,
But at the close a Hand came through
The fire above my head, and drew
My soul to Christ, whom now I see.
Sergius, a brother, writes for me
This testimony on the wall —
For me, I have forgot it all.'
You say right; this were not so hard!
And since one nowise is debarred
From this, why not escape some sins
By such a method?"

X.

Then begins
To the old point revulsion new —
(For 't is just this I bring you to) —
If after all we should mistake,
And so renounce life for the sake
Of death and nothing else? You hear
Each friend we jeered at, send the jeer
Back to ourselves with good effect —
"There were my beetles to collect!
My box — a trifle, I confess,
But here I hold it, ne'ertheless!"
Poor idiots, (let us pluck up heart
And answer) we, the better part
Have chosen, though 't were only hope, —
Nor envy moles like you that grope

Amid your veritable muck,
More than the grasshoppers would truck,
For yours, their passionate life away,
That spends itself in leaps all day
To reach the sun, you want the eyes
To see, as they the wings to rise
And match the noble hearts of them!
Thus the contemner we contemn, —
And, when doubt strikes us, thus we ward
Its stroke off, caught upon our guard,
— Not struck enough to overturn
Our faith, but shake it — make us learn
What I began with, and, I wis,
End, having proved, — how hard it is
To be a Christian!

XI.

"Proved, or not,
Howe'er you wis, small thanks, I wot,
You get of mine, for taking pains
To make it hard to me. Who gains
By that, I wonder? Here I live
In trusting ease; and here you drive
At causing me to lose what most
Yourself would mourn for had you lost!"

XII.

But, do you see, my friend, that thus
You leave St. Paul for Æschylus?
— Who made his Titan's arch-device
The giving men *blind hopes* to spice
The meal of life with, else devoured
In bitter haste, while lo, death loured
Before them at the platter's edge!
If faith should be, as I allege,
Quite other than a condiment
To heighten flavors with, or meant
(Like that brave curry of his Grace)
To take at need the victuals' place?
If, having dined, you would digest
Besides, and turning to your rest
Should find instead . . .

XIII.

Now, you shall see
And judge if a mere foppery

Pricks on my speaking! I resolve
To utter — yes, it shall devolve
On you to hear as solemn, strange
And dread a thing as in the range
Of facts, — or fancies, if God will —
E'er happened to our kind! I still
Stand in the cloud and, while it wraps
My face, ought not to speak perhaps;
Seeing that if I carry through
My purpose, if my words in you
Find a live actual listener,
My story, reason must aver
False after all — the happy chance!
While, if each human countenance
I meet in London day by day,
Be what I fear, — my warnings fray
No one, and no one they convert,
And no one helps me to assert
How hard it is to really be
A Christian, and in vacancy
I pour this story!

XIV.

I commence
By trying to inform you, whence
It comes that every Easter-night
As now, I sit up, watch, till light,
Upon those chimney-stacks and roofs,
Give, through my window-pane, gray proofs
That Easter-Day is breaking slow.
On such a night, three years ago,
It chanced that I had cause to cross
The common, where the chapel was,
Our friend spoke of, the other day —
You 've not forgotten, I dare say.
I fell to musing of the time
So close, the blessed matin-prime
All hearts leap up at, in some guise —
One could not well do otherwise.
Insensibly my thoughts were bent
Toward the main point; I overwent
Much the same ground of reasoning
As you and I just now. One thing
Remained, however — one that tasked
My soul to answer; and I asked,
Fairly and frankly, what might be

That History, that Faith, to me
— Me there — not me in some domain
Built up and peopled by my brain,
Weighing its merits as one weighs
Mere theories for blame or praise,
— The kingcraft of the Lucumons,
Or Fourier's scheme, its pros and cons, —
But my faith there, or none at all.
"How were my case, now, did I fall
Dead here, this minute — should I lie
Faithful or faithless?" Note that I
Inclined thus ever! — little prone
For instance, when I lay alone
In childhood, to go calm to sleep
And leave a closet where might keep
His watch perdue some murderer
Waiting till twelve o'clock to stir,
As good authentic legends tell:
"He might: but how improbable!
How little likely to deserve
The pains and trial to the nerve
Of thrusting head into the dark!" —
Urged my old nurse, and bade me mark
Beside, that, should the dreadful scout
Really lie hid there, and leap out
At first turn of the rusty key,
Mine were small gain that she could see,
Killed not in bed but on the floor,
And losing one night's sleep the more.
I tell you, I would always burst
The door ope, know my fate at first.
This time, indeed, the closet penned
No such assassin: but a friend
Rather, peeped out to guard me, fit
For counsel, Common Sense, to wit,
Who said a good deal that might pass, —
Heartening, impartial too, it was,
Judge else: "For, soberly now, — who
Should be a Christian if not you?"
(Hear how he smoothed me down.) "One takes
A whole life, sees what course it makes
Mainly, and not by fits and starts —
In spite of stoppage which imparts
Fresh value to the general speed.
A life, with none, would fly indeed:
Your progressing is slower — right!

We deal with progress and not flight.
Through baffling senses passionate,
Fancies as restless, — with a freight
Of knowledge cumbersome enough
To sink your ship when waves grow rough,
Though meant for ballast in the hold, —
I find, 'mid dangers manifold,
The good bark answers to the helm
Where faith sits, easier to o'erwhelm
Than some stout peasant's heavenly guide,
Whose hard head could not, if it tried,
Conceive a doubt, nor understand
How senses hornier than his hand
Should 'tice the Christian off his guard.
More happy! But shall we award
Less honor to the hull which, dogged
By storms, a mere wreck, waterlogged,
Masts by the board, her bulwarks gone
And stanchions going, yet bears on, —
Than to mere lifeboats, built to save,
And triumph o'er the breaking wave?
Make perfect your good ship as these,
And what were her performances!"
I added — "Would the ship reach home!
I wish indeed 'God's kingdom come' —
The day when I shall see appear
His bidding, as my duty, clear
From doubt! And it shall dawn, that day,
Some future season; Easter may
Prove, not impossibly, the time —
Yes, that were striking — fates would chime
So aptly! Easter-morn, to bring
The Judgment! — deeper in the spring
Than now, however, when there 's snow
Capping the hills; for earth must show
All signs of meaning to pursue
Her tasks as she was wont to do
— The skylark, taken by surprise
As we ourselves, shall recognize
Sudden the end. For suddenly
It comes; the dreadfulness must be
In that; all warrants the belief —
'At night it cometh like a thief.'
I fancy why the trumpet blows;
— Plainly, to wake one. From repose
We shall start up, at last awake

From life, that insane dream we take
For waking now, because it seems.
And as, when now we wake from dreams,
We laugh, while we recall them, 'Fool,
To let the chance slip, linger cool
When such adventure offered! Just
A bridge to cross, a dwarf to thrust
Aside, a wicked mage to stab —
And, lo ye, I had kissed Queen Mab!'
So shall we marvel why we grudged
Our labor here, and idly judged
Of heaven, we might have gained, but lose!
Lose? Talk of loss, and I refuse
To plead at all! You speak no worse
Nor better than my ancient nurse
When she would tell me in my youth
I well deserved that shapes uncouth
Frighted and teased me in my sleep:
Why could I not in memory keep
Her precept for the evil's cure?
'Pinch your own arm, boy, and be sure
You 'll wake forthwith!'"

XV.

And as I said
This nonsense, throwing back my head
With light complacent laugh, I found
Suddenly all the midnight round
One fire. The dome of heaven had stood
As made up of a multitude
Of handbreadth cloudlets, one vast rack
Of ripples infinite and black,
From sky to sky. Sudden there went,
Like horror and astonishment,
A fierce vindictive scribble of red
Quick flame across, as if one said
(The angry scribe of Judgment) "There —
Burn it!" And straight I was aware
That the whole ribwork round, minute
Cloud touching cloud beyond compute,
Was tinted, each with its own spot
Of burning at the core, till clot
Jammed against clot, and spilt its fire
Over all heaven, which 'gan suspire
As fanned to measure equable, —
Just so great conflagrations kill

Night overhead, and rise and sink,
Reflected. Now the fire would shrink
And wither off the blasted face
Of heaven, and I distinct might trace
The sharp black ridgy outlines left
Unburned like network — then, each cleft
The fire had been sucked back into,
Regorged, and out it surging flew
Furiously, and night writhed inflamed,
Till, tolerating to be tamed
No longer, certain rays world-wide
Shot downwardly. On every side
Caught past escape, the earth was lit;
As if a dragon's nostril split
And all his famished ire o'erflowed;
Then as he winced at his lord's goad,
Back he inhaled: whereat I found
The clouds into vast pillars bound,
Based on the corners of the earth,
Propping the skies at top: a dearth
Of fire i' the violet intervals,
Leaving exposed the utmost walls
Of time, about to tumble in
And end the world.

XVI.

I felt begin
The Judgment-Day: to retrocede
Was too late now. "In very deed,"
(I uttered to myself) "that Day!"
The intuition burned away
All darkness from my spirit too:
There, stood I, found and fixed, I knew,
Choosing the world. The choice was made;
And naked and disguiseless stayed,
And unevadable, the fact.
My brain held all the same compact
Its senses, nor my heart declined
Its office; rather, both combined
To help me in this juncture. I
Lost not a second, — agony
Gave boldness: since my life had end
And my choice with it — best defend,
Applaud both! I resolved to say,
"So was I framed by thee, such way
I put to use thy senses here!

It was so beautiful, so near,
Thy world, — what could I then but choose
My part there? Nor did I refuse
To look above the transient boon
Of time; but it was hard so soon
As in a short life, to give up
Such beauty: I could put the cup,
Undrained of half its fulness, by;
But, to renounce it utterly,
— That was too hard! Nor did the cry
Which bade renounce it, touch my brain
Authentically deep and plain
Enough to make my lips let go.
But thou, who knowest all, dost know
Whether I was not, life's brief while,
Endeavoring to reconcile
Those lips (too tardily, alas!)
To letting the dear remnant pass,
One day, — some drops of earthly good
Untasted! Is it for this mood,
That Thou, whose earth delights so well,
Hast made its complement a hell?"

XVII.

A final belch of fire like blood,
Overbroke all heaven in one flood
Of doom. Then fire was sky, and sky
Fire, and both, one brief ecstasy,
Then ashes. But I heard no noise
(Whatever was) because a voice
Beside me spoke thus, "Life is done,
Time ends, Eternity 's begun,
And thou art judged forevermore."

XVIII.

I looked up; all seemed as before;
Of that cloud-Tophet overhead
No trace was left: I saw instead
The common round me, and the sky
Above, stretched drear and emptily
Of life. 'T was the last watch of night,
Except what brings the morning quite;
When the armed angel, conscience-clear,
His task nigh done, leans o'er his spear
And gazes on the earth he guards,
Safe one night more through all its wards,

Till God relieve him at his post.
"A dream — a waking dream at most!"
(I spoke out quick, that I might shake
The horrid nightmare off, and wake.)
"The world gone, yet the world is here?
Are not all things as they appear?
Is Judgment past for me alone?
— And where had place the great white throne?
The rising of the quick and dead?
Where stood they, small and great? Who read
The sentence from the opened book?"
So, by degrees, the blood forsook
My heart, and let it beat afresh;
I knew I should break through the mesh
Of horror, and breathe presently:
When, lo, again, the voice by me!

XIX.

I saw . . . O brother, 'mid far sands
The palm-tree-cinctured city stands,
Bright-white beneath, as heaven, bright-blue,
Leans o'er it, while the years pursue
Their course, unable to abate
Its paradisal laugh at fate!
One morn, — the Arab staggers blind
O'er a new tract of death, calcined
To ashes, silence, nothingness, —
And strives, with dizzy wits, to guess
Whence fell the blow. What if, 'twixt skies
And prostrate earth, he should surprise
The imaged vapor, head to foot,
Surveying, motionless and mute,
Its work, ere, in a whirlwind rapt
It vanish up again? — So hapt
My chance. HE stood there. Like the smoke
Pillared o'er Sodom, when day broke, —
I saw Him. One magnific pall
Mantled in massive fold and fall
His head, and coiled in snaky swathes
About His feet: night's black, that bathes
All else, broke, grizzled with despair,
Against the soul of blackness there.
A gesture told the mood within —
That wrapped right hand which based the chin,
That intense meditation fixed
On His procedure, — pity mixed

With the fulfilment of decree.
Motionless, thus, He spoke to me,
Who fell before His feet, a mass,
No man now.

XX.

"All is come to pass.
Such shows are over for each soul
They had respect to. In the roll
Of Judgment which convinced mankind
Of sin, stood many, bold and blind,
Terror must burn the truth into:
Their fate for them! — thou hadst to do
With absolute omnipotence,
Able its judgments to dispense
To the whole race, as every one
Were its sole object. Judgment done,
God is, thou art, — the rest is hurled
To nothingness for thee. This world,
This finite life, thou hast preferred,
In disbelief of God's plain word,
To heaven and to infinity.
Here the probation was for thee,
To show thy soul the earthly mixed
With heavenly, it must choose betwixt.
The earthly joys lay palpable, —
A taint, in each, distinct as well;
The heavenly flitted, faint and rare,
Above them, but as truly were
Taintless, so, in their nature, best.
Thy choice was earth: thou didst attest
'T was fitter spirit should subserve
The flesh, than flesh refine to nerve
Beneath the spirit's play. Advance
No claim to their inheritance
Who chose the spirit's fugitive
Brief gleams, and yearned, 'This were to live
Indeed, if rays, completely pure
From flesh that dulls them, could endure, —
Not shoot in meteor-light athwart
Our earth, to show how cold and swart
It lies beneath their fire, but stand
As stars do, destined to expand,
Prove veritable worlds, our home!'
Thou saidst, — 'Let spirit star the dome
Of sky, that flesh may miss no peak,

No nook of earth, — I shall not seek
Its service further!' Thou art shut
Out of the heaven of spirit; glut
Thy sense upon the world: 't is thine
Forever — take it!"

XXI.

"How? Is mine,
The world?" (I cried, while my soul broke
Out in a transport.) "Hast Thou spoke
Plainly in that? Earth's exquisite
Treasures of wonder and delight
For me?"

XXII.

The austere voice returned, —
"So soon made happy? Hadst thou learned
What God accounteth happiness,
Thou wouldst not find it hard to guess
What hell may be his punishment
For those who doubt if God invent
Better than they. Let such men rest
Content with what they judged the best.
Let the unjust usurp at will:
The filthy shall be filthy still:
Miser, there waits the gold for thee!
Hater, indulge thine enmity!
And thou, whose heaven self-ordained
Was, to enjoy earth unrestrained,
Do it! Take all the ancient show!
The woods shall wave, the rivers flow,
And men apparently pursue
Their works, as they were wont to do,
While living in probation yet.
I promise not thou shalt forget
The past, now gone to its account;
But leave thee with the old amount
Of faculties, nor less nor more,
Unvisited, as heretofore,
By God's free spirit, that makes an end.
So, once more, take thy world! Expend
Eternity upon its shows,
Flung thee as freely as one rose
Out of a summer's opulence,
Over the Eden-barrier whence
Thou art excluded. Knock in vain!"

XXIII.

I sat up. All was still again.
I breathed free: to my heart, back fled
The warmth. "But, all the world!" — I said.
I stooped and picked a leaf of fern,
And recollected I might learn
From books, how many myriad sorts
Of fern exist, to trust reports,
Each as distinct and beautiful
As this, the very first I cull.
Think, from the first leaf to the last!
Conceive, then, earth's resources! Vast
Exhaustless beauty, endless change
Of wonder! And this foot shall range
Alps, Andes, — and this eye devour
The bee-bird and the aloe-flower?

XXIV.

Then the voice: "Welcome so to rate
The arras-folds that variegate
The earth, God's antechamber, well!
The wise, who waited there, could tell
By these, what royalties in store
Lay one step past the entrance-door.
For whom, was reckoned, not too much,
This life's munificence? For such
As thou, — a race, whereof scarce one
Was able, in a million,
To feel that any marvel lay
In objects round his feet all day;
Scarce one, in many millions more,
Willing, if able, to explore
The secreter, minuter charm!
— Brave souls, a fern-leaf could disarm
Of power to cope with God's intent, —
Or scared if the south firmament
With north-fire did its wings refledge!
All partial beauty was a pledge
Of beauty in its plenitude:
But since the pledge sufficed thy mood,
Retain it! plenitude be theirs
Who looked above!"

XXV.

Though sharp despairs
Shot through me, I held up, bore on.
"What matter though my trust were gone
From natural things? Henceforth my part
Be less with nature than with art!
For art supplants, gives mainly worth
To nature; 't is man stamps the earth —
And I will seek his impress, seek
The statuary of the Greek,
Italy's painting — there my choice
Shall fix!"

XXVI.

"Obtain it!" said the voice,
"— The one form with its single act,
Which sculptors labored to abstract,
The one face, painters tried to draw,
With its one look, from throngs they saw.
And that perfection in their soul,
These only hinted at? The whole,
They were but parts of? What each laid
His claim to glory on? — afraid
His fellow-men should give him rank
By mere tentatives which he shrank
Smitten at heart from, all the more,
That gazers pressed in to adore!
'Shall I be judged by only these?'
If such his soul's capacities,
Even while he trod the earth, — think, now,
What pomp in Buonarroti's brow,
With its new palace-brain where dwells
Superb the soul, unvexed by cells
That crumbled with the transient clay!
What visions will his right hand's sway
Still turn to forms, as still they burst
Upon him? How will he quench thirst,
Titanically infantine,
Laid at the breast of the Divine?
Does it confound thee, — this first page
Emblazoning man's heritage? —
Can this alone absorb thy sight,
As pages were not infinite, —
Like the omnipotence which tasks
Itself to furnish all that asks

The soul it means to satiate?
What was the world, the starry state
Of the broad skies, — what, all displays
Of power and beauty intermixed,
Which now thy soul is chained betwixt, —
What else than needful furniture
For life's first stage? God's work, be sure,
No more spreads wasted, than falls scant!
He filled, did not exceed, man's want
Of beauty in this life. But through
Life pierce, — and what has earth to do,
Its utmost beauty's appanage,
With the requirement of next stage?
Did God pronounce earth 'very good'?
Needs must it be, while understood
For man's preparatory state;
Nought here to heighten nor abate;
Transfer the same completeness here,
To serve a new state's use, — and drear
Deficiency gapes every side!
The good, tried once, were bad, retried.
See the enwrapping rocky niche,
Sufficient for the sleep in which
The lizard breathes for ages safe:
Split the mould — and as light would chafe
The creature's new world-widened sense,
Dazzled to death at evidence
Of all the sounds and sights that broke
Innumerous at the chisel's stroke, —
So, in God's eye, the earth's first stuff
Was, neither more nor less, enough
To house man's soul, man's need fulfil.
Man reckoned it immeasurable?
So thinks the lizard of his vault!
Could God be taken in default,
Short of contrivances, by you, —
Or reached, ere ready to pursue
His progress through eternity?
That chambered rock, the lizard's world,
Your easy mallet's blow has hurled
To nothingness forever; so,
Has God abolished at a blow
This world, wherein his saints were pent, —
Who, though found grateful and content,
With the provision there, as thou,
Yet knew he would not disallow

Their spirit's hunger, felt as well, —
Unsated, — not unsatable,
As paradise gives proof. Deride
Their choice now, thou who sit'st outside!"

XXVII.

I cried in anguish: "Mind, the mind,
So miserably cast behind,
To gain what had been wisely lost!
Oh, let me strive to make the most
Of the poor stinted soul, I nipped
Of budding wings, else now equipped
For voyage from summer isle to isle!
And though she needs must reconcile
Ambition to the life on ground,
Still, I can profit by late found
But precious knowledge. Mind is best —
I will seize mind, forego the rest,
And try how far my tethered strength
May crawl in this poor breadth and length.
Let me, since I can fly no more,
At least spin dervish-like about
(Till giddy rapture almost doubt
I fly) through circling sciences,
Philosophies and histories!
Should the whirl slacken there, then verse,
Fining to music, shall asperse
Fresh and fresh fire-dew, till I strain
Intoxicate, half-break my chain!
Not joyless, though more favored feet
Stand calm, where I want wings to beat
The floor. At least earth's bond is broke!"

XXVIII.

Then (sickening even while I spoke):
"Let me alone! No answer, pray,
To this! I know what thou wilt say!
All still is earth's, — to know, as much
As feel its truths, which if we touch
With sense, or apprehend in soul,
What matter? I have reached the goal —
'Whereto does knowledge serve!' will burn
My eyes, too sure, at every turn!
I cannot look back now, nor stake
Bliss on the race, for running's sake.
The goal 's a ruin like the rest!"

"And so much worse thy latter quest,"
(Added the voice,) "that even on earth —
Whenever, in man's soul, had birth
Those intuitions, grasps of guess,
Which pull the more into the less,
Making the finite comprehend
Infinity, — the bard would spend
Such praise alone, upon his craft,
As, when wind-lyres obey the waft,
Goes to the craftsman who arranged
The seven strings, changed them and rechanged —
Knowing it was the South that harped.
He felt his song, in singing, warped;
Distinguished his and God's part: whence
A world of spirit as of sense
Was plain to him, yet not too plain,
Which he could traverse, not remain
A guest in: — else were permanent
Heaven on the earth its gleams were meant
To sting with hunger for full light, —
Made visible in verse, despite
The veiling weakness, — truth by means
Of fable, showing while it screens, —
Since highest truth, man e'er supplied,
Was ever fable on outside.
Such gleams made bright the earth an age;
Now the whole sun 's his heritage!
Take up thy world, it is allowed,
Thou who hast entered in the cloud!"

XXIX.

Then I — "Behold, my spirit bleeds,
Catches no more at broken reeds, —
But lilies flower those reeds above:
I let the world go, and take love!
Love survives in me, albeit those
I love be henceforth masks and shows,
Not living men and women: still
I mind how love repaired all ill,
Cured wrong, soothed grief, made earth amends
With parents, brothers, children, friends!
Some semblance of a woman yet
With eyes to help me to forget,
Shall look on me; and I will match
Departed love with love, attach
Old memories to new dreams, nor scorn

The poorest of the grains of corn
I save from shipwreck on this isle,
Trusting its barrenness may smile
With happy foodful green one day,
More precious for the pains. I pray, —
Leave to love, only!"

XXX.

At the word,
The form, I looked to have been stirred
With pity and approval, rose
O'er me, as when the headsman throws
Axe over shoulder to make end —
I fell prone, letting Him expend
His wrath, while thus the inflicting voice
Smote me. "Is this thy final choice?
Love is the best? 'T is somewhat late!
And all thou dost enumerate
Of power and beauty in the world,
The mightiness of love was curled
Inextricably round about.
Love lay within it and without,
To clasp thee, — but in vain! Thy soul
Still shrunk from Him who made the whole,
Still set deliberate aside
His love! — Now take love! Well betide
Thy tardy conscience! Haste to take
The show of love for the name's sake,
Remembering every moment Who,
Beside creating thee unto
These ends, and these for thee, was said
To undergo death in thy stead
In flesh like thine: so ran the tale.
What doubt in thee could countervail
Belief in it? Upon the ground
'That in the story had been found
Too much love! How could God love so?
He who in all his works below
Adapted to the needs of man,
Made love the basis of the plan, —
Did love, as was demonstrated:
While man, who was so fit instead
To hate, as every day gave proof, —
Man thought man, for his kind's behoof,
Both could and did invent that scheme
Of perfect love: 't would well beseem

Cain's nature thou wast wont to praise,
Not tally with God's usual ways!"

XXXI.

And I cowered deprecatingly —
"Thou Love of God! Or let me die,
Or grant what shall seem heaven almost!
Let me not know that all is lost,
Though lost it be — leave me not tied
To this despair, this corpse-like bride!
Let that old life seem mine — no more —
With limitation as before,
With darkness, hunger, toil, distress:
Be all the earth a wilderness!
Only let me go on, go on,
Still hoping ever and anon
To reach one eve the Better Land!"

XXXII.

Then did the form expand, expand —
I knew Him through the dread disguise
As the whole God within His eyes
Embraced me.

XXXIII.

When I lived again,
The day was breaking, — the gray plain
I rose from, silvered thick with dew.
Was this a vision? False or true?
Since then, three varied years are spent,
And commonly my mind is bent
To think it was a dream — be sure
A mere dream and distemperature —
The last day's watching: then the night, —
The shock of that strange Northern Light
Set my head swimming, bred in me
A dream. And so I live, you see,
Go through the world, try, prove, reject,
Prefer, still struggling to effect
My warfare; happy that I can
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
Not left in God's contempt apart,
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.
Thank God, she still each method tries
To catch me, who may yet escape,

She knows, — the fiend in angel's shape!
Thank God, no paradise stands barred
To entry, and I find it hard
To be a Christian, as I said!
Still every now and then my head
Raised glad, sinks mournful — all grows drear
Spite of the sunshine, while I fear
And think, "How dreadful to be grudged
No ease henceforth, as one that 's judged,
Condemned to earth forever, shut
From heaven!"
But Easter-Day breaks! But
Christ rises! Mercy every way
Is infinite, — and who can say?

MEN AND WOMEN

LONDON AND FLORENCE, 184– 185–.

"TRANSCENDENTALISM: A POEM IN TWELVE BOOKS."

STOP playing, poet! May a brother speak?
'T is you speak, that 's your error. Song 's our art:
Whereas you please to speak these naked thoughts
Instead of draping them in sights and sounds.
— True thoughts, good thoughts, thoughts fit to treasure up!
But why such long prolusion and display,
Such turning and adjustment of the harp,
And taking it upon your breast, at length,
Only to speak dry words across its strings?
Stark-naked thought is in request enough:
Speak prose and hollo it till Europe hears!
The six-foot Swiss tube, braced about with bark,
Which helps the hunter's voice from Alp to Alp —
Exchange our harp for that, — who hinders you?

But here 's your fault; grown men want thought, you think;
Thought 's what they mean by verse, and seek in verse:
Boys seek for images and melody,
Men must have reason — so, you aim at men.
Quite otherwise! Objects throng our youth, 't is true;
We see and hear and do not wonder much:
If you could tell us what they mean, indeed!
As German Boehme never cared for plants
Until it happed, a-walking in the fields,
He noticed all at once that plants could speak,
Nay, turned with loosened tongue to talk with him.
That day the daisy had an eye indeed —
Colloquized with the cowslip on such themes!
We find them extant yet in Jacob's prose.
But by the time youth slips a stage or two
While reading prose in that tough book he wrote
(Collating and emendating the same
And settling on the sense most to our mind),
We shut the clasps and find life's summer past.

Then, who helps more, pray, to repair our loss —
Another Boehme with a tougher book
And subtler meanings of what roses say, —
Or some stout Mage like him of Halberstadt,
John, who made things Boehme wrote thoughts about?
He with a "look you!" vents a brace of rhymes,
And in there breaks the sudden rose herself,
Over us, under, round us every side,
Nay, in and out the tables and the chairs
And musty volumes, Boehme's book and all, —
Buries us with a glory, young once more,
Pouring heaven into this shut house of life.

So come, the harp back to your heart again!
You are a poem, though your poem 's nought.
The best of all you showed before, believe,
Was your own boy-face o'er the finer chords
Bent, following the cherub at the top
That points to God with his paired half-moon wings.

HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORARY.

I only knew one poet in my life:
And this, or something like it, was his way.

You saw go up and down Valladolid,
A man of mark, to know next time you saw.
His very serviceable suit of black
Was courtly once and conscientious still,
And many might have worn it, though none did:
The cloak, that somewhat shone and showed the threads,
Had purpose, and the ruff, significance.
He walked and tapped the pavement with his cane,
Scenting the world, looking it full in face,
An old dog, bald and blindish, at his heels.
They turned up, now, the alley by the church,
That leads no whither; now, they breathed themselves
On the main promenade just at the wrong time:
You 'd come upon his scrutinizing hat,
Making a peaked shade blacker than itself
Against the single window spared some house
Intact yet with its mouldered Moorish work, —
Or else surprise the ferrel of his stick
Trying the mortar's temper 'tween the chinks

Of some new shop a-building, French and fine.
He stood and watched the cobbler at his trade,
The man who slices lemons into drink,
The coffee-roaster's brazier, and the boys
That volunteer to help him turn its winch.
He glanced o'er books on stalls with half an eye,
And fly-leaf ballads on the vender's string,
And broad-edge bold-print posters by the wall.
He took such cognizance of men and things,
If any beat a horse, you felt he saw;
If any cursed a woman, he took note;
Yet stared at nobody, — you stared at him,
And found, less to your pleasure than surprise,
He seemed to know you and expect as much.
So, next time that a neighbor's tongue was loosed,
It marked the shameful and notorious fact,
We had among us, not so much a spy,
As a recording chief-inquisitor,
The town's true master if the town but knew!
We merely kept a governor for form,
While this man walked about and took account
Of all thought, said and acted, then went home,
And wrote it fully to our Lord the King
Who has an itch to know things, he knows why,
And reads them in his bedroom of a night.
Oh, you might smile! there wanted not a touch,
A tang of . . . well, it was not wholly ease
As back into your mind the man's look came.
Stricken in years a little, — such a brow
His eyes had to live under! — clear as flint
On either side the formidable nose
Curved, cut and colored like an eagle's claw.
Had he to do with A's surprising fate?
When altogether old B disappeared
And young C got his mistress, — was 't our friend,
His letter to the King, that did it all?
What paid the bloodless man for so much pains?
Our Lord the King has favorites manifold,
And shifts his ministry some once a month;
Our city gets new governors at whiles, —
But never word or sign, that I could hear,
Notified to this man about the streets
The King's approval of those letters conned
The last thing duly at the dead of night.
Did the man love his office? Frowned our Lord,
Exhorting when none heard — "Beseech me not!

Too far above my people, — beneath me!
I set the watch, — how should the people know?
Forget them, keep me all the more in mind!"
Was some such understanding 'twixt the two?

I found no truth in one report at least —
That if you tracked him to his home, down lanes
Beyond the Jewry, and as clean to pace,
You found he ate his supper in a room
Blazing with lights, four Titians on the wall,
And twenty naked girls to change his plate!
Poor man, he lived another kind of life
In that new stuccoed third house by the bridge,
Fresh-painted, rather smart than otherwise!
The whole street might o'erlook him as he sat,
Leg crossing leg, one foot on the dog's back,
Playing a decent cribbage with his maid
(Jacynth, you 're sure her name was) o'er the cheese
And fruit, three red halves of starved winter-pears,
Or treat of radishes in April. Nine,
Ten, struck the church clock, straight to bed went he.

My father, like the man of sense he was,
Would point him out to me a dozen times;
"'St — 'st," he 'd whisper, "the Corregidor!"
I had been used to think that personage
Was one with lacquered breeches, lustrous belt,
And feathers like a forest in his hat,
Who blew a trumpet and proclaimed the news,
Announced the bull-fights, gave each church its turn,
And memorized the miracle in vogue!
He had a great observance from us boys;
We were in error; that was not the man.

I 'd like now, yet had haply been afraid,
To have just looked, when this man came to die,
And seen who lined the clean gay garret-sides
And stood about the neat low truckle-bed,
With the heavenly manner of relieving guard.
Here had been, mark, the general-in-chief,
Through a whole campaign of the world's life and death,
Doing the King's work all the dim day long,
In his old coat and up to knees in mud,
Smoked liked a herring, dining on a crust, —
And, now the day was won, relieved at once!
No further show or need for that old coat,

You are sure, for one thing! Bless us, all the while
How sprucely we are dressed out, you and I!
A second, and the angels alter that.
Well, I could never write a verse, — could you?
Let 's to the Prado and make the most of time.

ARTEMIS PROLOGIZES.

I AM a goddess of the ambrosial courts,
And save by Here, Queen of Pride, surpassed
By none whose temples whiten this the world.
Through heaven I roll my lucid moon along;
I shed in hell o'er my pale people peace;
On earth I, caring for the creatures, guard
Each pregnant yellow wolf and fox-bitch sleek,
And every feathered mother's callow brood,
And all that love green haunts and loneliness.
Of men, the chaste adore me, hanging crowns
Of poppies red to blackness, bell and stem,
Upon my image at Athenai here;
And this dead Youth, Asclepios bends above,
Was dearest to me. He, my buskined step
To follow through the wild-wood leafy ways,
And chase the panting stag, or swift with darts
Stop the swift ounce, or lay the leopard low,
Neglected homage to another god:
Whence Aphrodite, by no midnight smoke
Of tapers lulled, in jealousy dispatched
A noisome lust that, as the gadbee stings,
Possessed his stepdame Phaidra for himself
The son of Theseus her great absent spouse.
Hippolutos exclaiming in his rage
Against the fury of the Queen, she judged
Life insupportable; and, pricked at heart
An Amazonian stranger's race should dare
To scorn her, perished by the murderous cord:
Yet, ere she perished, blasted in a scroll
The fame of him her swerving made not swerve.
And Theseus, read, returning, and believed,
And exiled, in the blindness of his wrath,
The man without a crime who, last as first,
Loyal, divulged not to his sire the truth.
Now Theseus from Poseidon had obtained
That of his wishes should be granted three,

And one he imprecated straight — "Alive
May ne'er Hippolutos reach other lands!"
Poseidon heard, ai ai! And scarce the prince
Had stepped into the fixed boots of the car
That give the feet a stay against the strength
Of the Henetian horses, and around
His body flung the rein, and urged their speed
Along the rocks and shingles of the shore,
When from the gaping wave a monster flung
His obscene body in the coursers' path.
These, mad with terror, as the sea-bull sprawled
Wallowing about their feet, lost care of him
That reared them; and the master-chariot-pole
Snapping beneath their plunges like a reed,
Hippolutos, whose feet were trammelled fast,
Was yet dragged forward by the circling rein
Which either hand directed; nor they quenched
The frenzy of their flight before each trace,
Wheel-spoke and splinter of the woful car,
Each boulder-stone, sharp stub and spiny shell,
Huge fishbone wrecked and wreathed amid the sands
On that detested beach, was bright with blood
And morsels of his flesh: then fell the steeds
Head-foremost, crashing in their mooned fronts,
Shivering with sweat, each white eye horror-fixed.
His people, who had witnessed all afar,
Bore back the ruins of Hippolutos.
But when his sire, too swoln with pride, rejoiced
(Indomitable as a man foredoomed)
That vast Poseidon had fulfilled his prayer,
I, in a flood of glory visible,
Stood o'er my dying votary and, deed
By deed, revealed, as all took place, the truth.
Then Theseus lay the wofullest of men,
And worthily; but ere the death-veils hid
His face, the murdered prince full pardon breathed
To his rash sire. Whereat Athenai wails.

So I, who ne'er forsake my votaries,
Lest in the crossway none the honey-cake
Should tender, nor pour out the dog's hot life;
Lest at my fane the priests disconsolate
Should dress my image with some faded poor
Few crowns, made favors of, nor dare object
Such slackness to my worshippers who turn
Elsewhere the trusting heart and loaded hand.

As they had climbed Olumpos to report
Of Artemis and nowhere found her throne —
I interposed: and, this eventful night, —
(While round the funeral pyre the populace
Stood with fierce light on their black robes which bound
Each sobbing head, while yet their hair they clipped
O'er the dead body of their withered prince,
And, in his palace, Theseus prostrated
On the cold hearth, his brow cold as the slab
'T was bruised on, groaned away the heavy grief —
As the pyre fell, and down the cross logs crashed
Sending a crowd of sparkles through the night,
And the gay fire, elate with mastery,
Towered like a serpent o'er the clotted jars
Of wine, dissolving oils and frankincense,
And splendid gums like gold,) — my potency
Conveyed the perished man to my retreat
In the thrice-venerable forest here.
And this white-bearded sage who squeezes now
The berried plant, is Phoibos' son of fame,
Asclepios, whom my radiant brother taught
The doctrine of each herb and flower and root,
To know their secret'st virtue and express
The saving soul of all: who so has soothed
With lavers the torn brow and murdered cheeks,
Composed the hair and brought its gloss again,
And called the red bloom to the pale skin back,
And laid the strips and jagged ends of flesh
Even once more, and slacked the sinew's knot
Of every tortured limb — that now he lies
As if mere sleep possessed him underneath
These interwoven oaks and pines. Oh cheer,
Divine presenter of the healing rod,
Thy snake, with ardent throat and lulling eye,
Twines his lithe spires around! I say, much cheer!
Proceed thou with thy wisest pharmacies!
And ye, white crowd of woodland sister-nymphs,
Ply, as the sage directs, these buds and leaves
That strew the turf around the twain! While I
Await, in fitting silence, the event.

AN EPISTLE

CONTAINING THE

STRANGE MEDICAL EXPERIENCE OF KARSHISH, THE ARAB PHYSICIAN.

Karshish, the picker-up of learning's crumbs,
The not-incurious in God's handiwork
(This man's-flesh he hath admirably made,
Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste,
To coop up and keep down on earth a space
That puff of vapor from his mouth, man's soul)
— To Abib, all-sagacious in our art,
Breeder in me of what poor skill I boast,
Like me inquisitive how pricks and cracks
Befall the flesh through too much stress and strain,
Whereby the wily vapor fain would slip
Back and rejoin its source before the term, —
And aptest in contrivance (under God)
To baffle it by deftly stopping such: —
The vagrant Scholar to his Sage at home
Sends greeting (health and knowledge, fame with peace)
Three samples of true snake-stone — rarer still,
One of the other sort, the melon-shaped,
(But fitter, pounded fine, for charms than drugs)
And writeth now the twenty-second time.

My journeyings were brought to Jericho:
Thus I resume. Who studious in our art
Shall count a little labor unrepaid?
I have shed sweat enough, left flesh and bone
On many a flinty furlong of this land.
Also, the country-side is all on fire
With rumors of a marching hitherward:
Some say Vespasian cometh, some, his son.
A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear;
Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls:
I cried and threw my staff and he was gone.
Twice have the robbers stripped and beaten me,
And once a town declared me for a spy;
But at the end, I reach Jerusalem,
Since this poor covert where I pass the night,
This Bethany, lies scarce the distance thence
A man with plague-sores at the third degree

Runs till he drops down dead. Thou laughest here!
'Sooth, it elates me, thus reposed and safe,
To void the stuffing of my travel-scrip
And share with thee whatever Jewry yields.
A viscid choler is observable
In tertians, I was nearly bold to say;
And falling-sickness hath a happier cure
Than our school wots of: there 's a spider here
Weaves no web, watches on the ledge of tombs,
Sprinkled with mottles on an ash-gray back;
Take five and drop them . . . but who knows his mind,
The Syrian runagate I trust this to?
His service payeth me a sublimate
Blown up his nose to help the ailing eye.
Best wait: I reach Jerusalem at morn,
There set in order my experiences,
Gather what most deserves, and give thee all —
Or I might add, Judæa's gum-tragacanth
Scales off in purer flakes, shines clearer-grained,
Cracks 'twixt the pestle and the porphyry,
In fine exceeds our produce. Scalp-disease
Confounds me, crossing so with leprosy —
Thou hadst admired one sort I gained at Zoar —
But zeal outruns discretion. Here I end.

Yet stay: my Syrian blinketh gratefully,
Protesteth his devotion is my price —
Suppose I write what harms not, though he steal?
I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush,
What set me off a-writing first of all.
An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang!
For, be it this town's barrenness — or else
The Man had something in the look of him —
His case has struck me far more than 't is worth.
So, pardon if — (lest presently I lose
In the great press of novelty at hand
The care and pains this somehow stole from me)
I bid thee take the thing while fresh in mind,
Almost in sight — for, wilt thou have the truth?
The very man is gone from me but now,
Whose ailment is the subject of discourse.
Thus then, and let thy better wit help all!

'T is but a case of mania — subinduced
By epilepsy, at the turning-point
Of trance prolonged unduly some three days:

When, by the exhibition of some drug
Or spell, exorcization, stroke of art
Unknown to me and which 't were well to know,
The evil thing out-breaking all at once
Left the man whole and sound of body indeed, —
But, flinging (so to speak) life's gates too wide,
Making a clear house of it too suddenly,
The first conceit that entered might inscribe
Whatever it was minded on the wall
So plainly at that vantage, as it were,
(First come, first served) that nothing subsequent
Attaineth to erase those fancy-scrawls
The just-returned and new-established soul
Hath gotten now so thoroughly by heart
That henceforth she will read or these or none.
And first — the man's own firm conviction rests
That he was dead (in fact they buried him)
— That he was dead and then restored to life
By a Nazarene physician of his tribe:
— 'Sayeth, the same bade "Rise," and he did rise.
"Such cases are diurnal," thou wilt cry.
Not so this figment! — not, that such a fume,
Instead of giving way to time and health,
Should eat itself into the life of life,
As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones and all!
For see, how he takes up the after-life.
The man — it is one Lazarus a Jew,
Sanguine, proportioned, fifty years of age,
The body's habit wholly laudable,
As much, indeed, beyond the common health
As he were made and put aside to show.
Think, could we penetrate by any drug
And bathe the wearied soul and worried flesh,
And bring it clear and fair, by three days' sleep!
Whence has the man the balm that brightens all?
This grown man eyes the world now like a child.
Some elders of his tribe, I should premise,
Led in their friend, obedient as a sheep,
To bear my inquisition. While they spoke,
Now sharply, now with sorrow, — told the case, —
He listened not except I spoke to him,
But folded his two hands and let them talk,
Watching the flies that buzzed: and yet no fool.
And that 's a sample how his years must go.
Look, if a beggar, in fixed middle-life,
Should find a treasure, — can he use the same

With straitened habits and with tastes starved small,
And take at once to his impoverished brain
The sudden element that changes things,
That sets the undreamed-of rapture at his hand
And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust?
Is he not such an one as moves to mirth —
Warily parsimonious, when no need,
Wasteful as drunkenness at undue times?
All prudent counsel as to what befits
The golden mean, is lost on such an one:
The man's fantastic will is the man's law.
So here — we call the treasure knowledge, say,
Increased beyond the fleshly faculty —
Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,
Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing heaven:
The man is witless of the size, the sum,
The value in proportion of all things,
Or whether it be little or be much.
Discourse to him of prodigious armaments
Assembled to besiege his city now,
And of the passing of a mule with gourds —
'T is one! Then take it on the other side,
Speak of some trifling fact, — he will gaze rapt
With stupor at its very littleness,
(Far as I see) as if in that indeed
He caught prodigious import, whole results;
And so will turn to us the bystanders
In ever the same stupor (note this point)
That we too see not with his opened eyes.
Wonder and doubt come wrongly into play,
Preposterously, at cross purposes.
Should his child sicken unto death, — why, look
For scarce abatement of his cheerfulness,
Or pretermission of the daily craft!
While a word, gesture, glance from that same child
At play or in the school or laid asleep,
Will startle him to an agony of fear,
Exasperation, just as like. Demand
The reason why — "'t is but a word," object —
"A gesture" — he regards thee as our lord
Who lived there in the pyramid alone,
Looked at us (dost thou mind?) when, being young,
We both would unadvisedly recite
Some charm's beginning, from that book of his,
Able to bid the sun throb wide and burst
All into stars, as suns grown old are wont.

Thou and the child have each a veil alike
Thrown o'er your heads, from under which ye both
Stretch your blind hands and trifle with a match
Over a mine of Greek fire, did ye know!
He holds on firmly to some thread of life —
(It is the life to lead perforcedly)
Which runs across some vast distracting orb
Of glory on either side that meagre thread,
Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet —
The spiritual life around the earthly life:
The law of that is known to him as this,
His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here.
So is the man perplext with impulses
Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,
Proclaiming what is right and wrong across,
And not along, this black thread through the blaze —
"It should be" balked by "here it cannot be."
And oft the man's soul springs into his face
As if he saw again and heard again
His sage that bade him "Rise" and he did rise.
Something, a word, a tick o' the blood within
Admonishes: then back he sinks at once
To ashes, who was very fire before,
In sedulous recurrence to his trade
Whereby he earneth him the daily bread;
And studiously the humbler for that pride,
Professedly the faultier that he knows
God's secret, while he holds the thread of life.
Indeed the especial marking of the man
Is prone submission to the heavenly will —
Seeing it, what it is, and why it is.
'Sayeth, he will wait patient to the last
For that same death which must restore his being
To equilibrium, body loosening soul
Divorced even now by premature full growth:
He will live, nay, it pleaseth him to live
So long as God please, and just how God please.
He even seeketh not to please God more
(Which meaneth, otherwise) than as God please.
Hence, I perceive not he affects to preach
The doctrine of his sect whate'er it be,
Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do:
How can he give his neighbor the real ground,
His own conviction? Ardent as he is —
Call his great truth a lie, why, still the old
"Be it as God please" reassureth him.

I probed the sore as thy disciple should:
"How, beast," said I, "this stolid carelessness
Sufficeth thee, when Rome is on her march
To stamp out like a little spark thy town,
Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once?"
He merely looked with his large eyes on me.
The man is apathetic, you deduce?
Contrariwise, he loves both old and young,
Able and weak, affects the very brutes
And birds — how say I? flowers of the field —
As a wise workman recognizes tools
In a master's workshop, loving what they make.
Thus is the man as harmless as a lamb:
Only impatient, let him do his best,
At ignorance and carelessness and sin —
An indignation which is promptly curbed:
As when in certain travel I have feigned
To be an ignoramus in our art
According to some preconceived design,
And happed to hear the land's practitioners,
Steeped in conceit sublimed by ignorance,
Prattle fantastically on disease,
Its cause and cure — and I must hold my peace!

Thou wilt object — Why have I not ere this
Sought out the sage himself, the Nazarene
Who wrought this cure, inquiring at the source,
Conferring with the frankness that befits?
Alas! it grieveth me, the learned leech
Perished in a tumult many years ago,
Accused — our learning's fate — of wizardry,
Rebellion, to the setting up a rule
And creed prodigious as described to me.
His death, which happened when the earthquake fell
(Prefiguring, as soon appeared, the loss
To occult learning in our lord the sage
Who lived there in the pyramid alone)
Was wrought by the mad people — that 's their wont!
On vain recourse, as I conjecture it,
To his tried virtue, for miraculous help —
How could he stop the earthquake? That 's their way!
The other imputations must be lies:
But take one, though I loathe to give it thee,
In mere respect for any good man's fame.
(And after all, our patient Lazarus
Is stark mad; should we count on what he says?

Perhaps not: though in writing to a leech
'T is well to keep back nothing of a case.)
This man so cured regards the curer, then,
As — God forgive me! who but God himself,
Creator and sustainer of the world,
That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile!
— 'Sayeth that such an one was born and lived,
Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own house,
Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I know,
And yet was . . . what I said nor choose repeat,
And must have so avouched himself, in fact,
In hearing of this very Lazarus
Who saith — but why all this of what he saith?
Why write of trivial matters, things of price
Calling at every moment for remark?
I noticed on the margin of a pool
Blue-flowering borage, the Aleppo sort,
Aboundeth, very nitrous. It is strange!

Thy pardon for this long and tedious case,
Which, now that I review it, needs must seem
Unduly dwelt on, prolixly set forth!
Nor I myself discern in what is writ
Good cause for the peculiar interest
And awe indeed this man has touched me with.
Perhaps the journey's end, the weariness
Had wrought upon me first. I met him thus:
I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills
Like an old lion's cheek teeth. Out there came
A moon made like a face with certain spots
Multiform, manifold, and menacing:
Then a wind rose behind me. So we met
In this old sleepy town at unaware,
The man and I. I send thee what is writ.
Regard it as a chance, a matter risked
To this ambiguous Syrian — he may lose,
Or steal, or give it thee with equal good.
Jerusalem's repose shall make amends
For time this letter wastes, thy time and mine;
Till when, once more thy pardon and farewell!

The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think?
So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too —
So, through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!

Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee!"
The madman saith He said so: it is strange.

JOHANNES AGRICOLA IN MEDITATION.

There 's heaven above, and night by night
I look right through its gorgeous roof;
No suns and moons though e'er so bright
Avail to stop me; splendor-proof
I keep the broods of stars aloof:
For I intend to get to God,
For 't is to God I speed so fast,
For in God's breast, my own abode,
Those shoals of dazzling glory, passed,
I lay my spirit down at last.
I lie where I have always lain,
God smiles as he has always smiled;
Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,
Ere stars were thundergirt, or piled
The heavens, God thought on me his child;
Ordained a life for me, arrayed
Its circumstances every one
To the minutest; ay, God said
This head this hand should rest upon
Thus, ere he fashioned star or sun.
And having thus created me,
Thus rooted me, he bade me grow,
Guiltless forever, like a tree
That buds and blooms, nor seeks to know
The law by which it prospers so:
But sure that thought and word and deed
All go to swell his love for me,
Me, made because that love had need
Of something irreversibly
Pledged solely its content to be.
Yes, yes, a tree which must ascend,
No poison-gourd foredoomed to stoop!
I have God's warrant, could I blend
All hideous sins, as in a cup,
To drink the mingled venoms up;
Secure my nature will convert
The draught to blossoming gladness fast:
While sweet dews turn to the gourd's hurt,

And bloat, and while they bloat it, blast,
As from the first its lot was cast.
For as I lie, smiled on, full-fed
By unexhausted power to bless,
I gaze below on hell's fierce bed,
And those its waves of flame oppress,
Swarming in ghastly wretchedness;
Whose life on earth aspired to be
One altar-smoke, so pure! — to win
If not love like God's love for me,
At least to keep his anger in;
And all their striving turned to sin.
Priest, doctor, hermit, monk grown white
With prayer, the broken-hearted nun,
The martyr, the wan acolyte,
The incense-swinging child, — undone
Before God fashioned star or sun!
God, whom I praise; how could I praise,
If such as I might understand,
Make out and reckon on his ways,
And bargain for his love, and stand,
Paying a price, at his right hand?

PICTOR IGNOTUS.

FLORENCE, 15—.

I COULD have painted pictures like that youth's
Ye praise so. How my soul springs up! No bar
Stayed me — ah, thought which saddens while it soothes
— Never did fate forbid me, star by star,
To outburst on your night with all my gift
Of fires from God: nor would my flesh have shrunk
From seconding my soul, with eyes uplift
And wide to heaven, or, straight like thunder, sunk
To the centre, of an instant; or around
Turned calmly and inquisitive, to scan
The license and the limit, space and bound,
Allowed to truth made visible in man.
And, like that youth ye praise so, all I saw,
Over the canvas could my hand have flung,
Each face obedient to its passion's law,
Each passion clear proclaimed without a tongue;
Whether Hope rose at once in all the blood,
A-tiptoe for the blessing of embrace,

Or Rapture drooped the eyes, as when her brood
  Pull down the nesting dove's heart to its place;
Or Confidence lit swift the forehead up,
  And locked the mouth fast, like a castle braved, —
O human faces, hath it spilt, my cup?
  What did ye give me that I have not saved?
Nor will I say I have not dreamed (how well!)
  Of going — I, in each new picture, — forth,
As, making new hearts beat and bosoms swell,
  To Pope or Kaiser, East, West, South, or North,
Bound for the calmly satisfied great State,
  Or glad aspiring little burgh, it went,
Flowers cast upon the car which bore the freight,
  Through old streets named afresh from the event,
Till it reached home, where learned age should greet
  My face, and youth, the star not yet distinct
Above his hair, lie learning at my feet! —
  Oh, thus to live, I and my picture, linked
With love about, and praise, till life should end,
  And then not go to heaven, but linger here,
Here on my earth, earth's every man my friend, —
  The thought grew frightful, 't was so wildly dear!
But a voice changed it. Glimpses of such sights
  Have scared me, like the revels through a door
Of some strange house of idols at its rites!
  This world seemed not the world it was before:
Mixed with my loving trusting ones, there trooped
  . . . Who summoned those cold faces that begun
To press on me and judge me? Though I stooped
  Shrinking, as from the soldiery a nun,
They drew me forth, and spite of me . . . enough!
  These buy and sell our pictures, take and give,
Count them for garniture and household-stuff,
  And where they live needs must our pictures live
And see their faces, listen to their prate,
  Partakers of their daily pettiness,
Discussed of, — "This I love, or this I hate,
  This likes me more, and this affects me less!"
Wherefore I chose my portion. If at whiles
  My heart sinks, as monotonous I paint
These endless cloisters and eternal aisles
  With the same series, Virgin, Babe and Saint,
With the same cold calm beautiful regard, —
  At least no merchant traffics in my heart;
The sanctuary's gloom at least shall ward
  Vain tongues from where my pictures stand apart:

Only prayer breaks the silence of the shrine
While, blackening in the daily candle-smoke,
They moulder on the damp wall's travertine,
'Mid echoes the light footstep never woke.
So, die my pictures! surely, gently die!
O youth, men praise so, — holds their praise its worth?
Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry?
Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth?

FRA LIPPO LIPPI.

I AM poor brother Lippo, by your leave!
You need not clap your torches to my face.
Zooks, what 's to blame? you think you see a monk!
What, 't is past midnight, and you go the rounds,
And here you catch me at an alley's end
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?
The Carmine 's my cloister: hunt it up,
Do, — harry out, if you must show your zeal,
Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,
And nip each softling of a wee white mouse,
Weke, weke, that 's crept to keep him company!
Aha, you know your betters! Then, you 'll take
Your hand away that 's fiddling on my throat,
And please to know me likewise. Who am I?
Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend
Three streets off — he 's a certain . . . how d' ye call?
Master — a . . . Cosimo of the Medici,
I' the house that caps the corner. Boh! you were best!
Remember and tell me, the day you 're hanged,
How you affected such a gullet's-gripe!
But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
Pick up a manner nor discredit you:
Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets
And count fair prize what comes into their net?
He 's Judas to a tittle, that man is!
Just such a face! Why, sir, you make amends.
Lord, I 'm not angry! Bid your hangdogs go
Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
Of the munificent House that harbors me
(And many more beside, lads! more beside!)
And all 's come square again. I 'd like his face —
His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
With the pike and lantern, — for the slave that holds
John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair

With one hand ("Look you, now," as who should say)
And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped!
It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,
A wood-coal or the like? or you should see!
Yes, I'm the painter, since you style me so.
What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down,
You know them and they take you? like enough!
I saw the proper twinkle in your eye —
'Tell you, I liked your looks at very first.
Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.
Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands
To roam the town and sing out carnival,
And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,
A-painting for the great man, saints and saints
And saints again. I could not paint all night —
Ouf! I leaned out of window for fresh air.
There came a hurry of feet and little feet,
A sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whifts of song, —
Flower o' the broom,
Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!
Flower o' the quince,
I let Lisa go, and what good in life since?
Flower o' the thyme — and so on. Round they went.
Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter
Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight, — three slim shapes,
And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and blood,
That's all I'm made of! Into shreds it went,
Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
All the bed-furniture — a dozen knots,
There was a ladder! Down I let myself,
Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,
And after them. I came up with the fun
Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met, —
Flower o' the rose,
If I've been merry, what matter who knows?
And so as I was stealing back again
To get to bed and have a bit of sleep
Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work
On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,
You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see!
Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head —
Mine's shaved — a monk, you say — the sting's in that!
If Master Cosimo announced himself,
Mum's the word naturally; but a monk!
Come, what am I a beast for? tell us, now!

I was a baby when my mother died
And father died and left me in the street.
I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,
My stomach being empty as your hat,
The wind doubled me up and down I went.
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
And so along the wall, over the bridge,
By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there,
While I stood munching my first bread that month:
"So, boy, you 're minded," quoth the good fat father,
Wiping his own mouth, 't was refection-time,—
"To quit this very miserable world?
Will you renounce" . . . "the mouthful of bread?" thought I;
By no means! Brief, they made a monk of me;
I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
Palace, farm, villa, shop, and banking-house,
Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici
Have given their hearts to—all at eight years old.
Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
'T was not for nothing—the good bellyful,
The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
And day-long blessed idleness beside!
"Let 's see what the urchin 's fit for"—that came next.
Not overmuch their way, I must confess.
Such a to-do! They tried me with their books:
Lord, they 'd have taught me Latin in pure waste!
Flower o' the clove,
All the Latin I construe is, "amo" I love!
But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets
Eight years together, as my fortune was,
Watching folk's faces to know who will fling
The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires,
And who will curse or kick him for his pains,—
Which gentleman processional and fine,
Holding a candle to the Sacrament,
Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch
The droppings of the wax to sell again,
Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped,—
How say I?—nay, which dog bites, which lets drop
His bone from the heap of offal in the street,—
Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,
He learns the look of things, and none the less
For admonition from the hunger-pinch.

I had a store of such remarks, be sure,
Which, after I found leisure, turned to use.
I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
Scrawled them within the antiphonary's marge,
Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's,
And made a string of pictures of the world
Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked black.
"Nay," quoth the Prior, "turn him out, d' ye say?
In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.
What if at last we get our man of parts,
We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese
And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine
And put the front on it that ought to be!"
And hereupon he bade me daub away.
Thank you! my head being crammed, the walls a blank,
Never was such prompt disemburdening.
First, every sort of monk, the black and white,
I drew them, fat and lean: then, folk at church,
From good old gossips waiting to confess
Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends, —
To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,
Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there
With the little children round him in a row
Of admiration, half for his beard and half
For that white anger of his victim's son
Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,
Signing himself with the other because of Christ
(Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
After the passion of a thousand years)
Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head,
(Which the intense eyes looked through) came at eve
On tiptoe, said a word, dropped in a loaf,
Her pair of earrings and a bunch of flowers
(The brute took growling), prayed, and so was gone.
I painted all, then cried "'T is ask and have;
Choose, for more 's ready!" — laid the ladder flat,
And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall.
The monks closed in a circle and praised loud
Till checked, taught what to see and not to see,
Being simple bodies, — "That 's the very man!
Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!
That woman 's like the Prior's niece who comes
To care about his asthma: it 's the life!"
But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and funked ·

Their betters took their turn to see and say :
The Prior and the learned pulled a face
And stopped all that in no time. " How ? what 's here ?
Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all !
Faces, arms, legs, and bodies like the true
As much as pea and pea ! it 's devil's-game !
Your business is not to catch men with show,
With homage to the perishable clay,
But lift them over it, ignore it all,
Make them forget there 's such a thing as flesh.
Your business is to paint the souls of men —
Man's soul, and it 's a fire, smoke . . . no, it 's not . . .
It 's vapor done up like a new-born babe —
(In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
It 's . . . well, what matters talking, it 's the soul !
Give us no more of body than shows soul !
Here 's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God,
That sets us praising, — why not stop with him ?
Why put all thoughts of praise out of our head
With wonder at lines, colors, and what not ?
Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms !
Rub all out, try at it a second time.
Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
She 's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say, —
Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off !
Have it all out ! " Now, is this sense, I ask ?
A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further
And can't fare worse ! Thus, yellow does for white
When what you put for yellow 's simply black,
And any sort of meaning looks intense
When all beside itself means and looks nought.
Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,
Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
Both in their order ? Take the prettiest face,
The Prior's niece . . . patron-saint — is it so pretty
You can't discover if it means hope, fear,
Sorrow or joy ? won't beauty go with these ?
Suppose I 've made her eyes all right and blue,
Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
And then add soul and heighten them threefold ?
Or say there 's beauty with no soul at all —
(I never saw it — put the case the same —)
If you get simple beauty and nought else,
You get about the best thing God invents :

That 's somewhat: and you 'll find the soul you have missed,
Within yourself, when you return him thanks.
"Rub all out!" Well, well, there 's my life, in short,
And so the thing has gone on ever since.
I 'm grown a man no doubt, I 've broken bounds:
You should not take a fellow eight years old
And make him swear to never kiss the girls.
I 'm my own master, paint now as I please —
Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house!
Lord, it 's fast holding by the rings in front —
Those great rings serve more purposes than just
To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse!
And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes
Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
The heads shake still — "It 's art's decline, my son!
You 're not of the true painters, great and old;
Brother Angelico 's the man, you 'll find;
Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer:
Fag on at flesh, you 'll never make the third!"
Flower o' the pine,
You keep your mistr . . . manners, and I'll stick to mine!
I 'm not the third, then: bless us, they must know!
Don't you think they 're the likeliest to know,
They with their Latin? So, I swallow my rage,
Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint
To please them — sometimes do and sometimes don't;
For, doing most, there 's pretty sure to come
A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints —
A laugh, a cry, the business of the world —
(*Flower o' the peach,*
Death for us all, and his own life for each!)
And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,
The world and life 's too big to pass for a dream,
And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
And play the fooleries you catch me at,
In pure rage! The old mill-horse, out at grass
After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,
Although the miller does not preach to him
The only good of grass is to make chaff.
What would men have? Do they like grass or no —
May they or may n't they? all I want 's the thing
Settled forever one way. As it is,
You tell too many lies and hurt yourself:
You don't like what you only like too much,
You do like what, if given you at your word,

You find abundantly detestable.
For me, I think I speak as I was taught;
I always see the garden and God there
A-making man's wife: and, my lesson learned,
The value and significance of flesh,
I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards.

You understand me: I 'm a beast, I know.
But see, now — why, I see as certainly
As that the morning-star 's about to shine,
What will hap some day. We 've a youngster here
Comes to our convent, studies what I do,
Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop:
His name is Guidi — he 'll not mind the monks —
They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk —
He picks my practice up — he 'll paint apace,
I hope so — though I never live so long,
I know what 's sure to follow. You be judge!
You speak no Latin more than I, belike;
However, you 're my man, you 've seen the world
— The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colors, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises, — and God made it all!
— For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
The mountain round it and the sky above,
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
These are the frame to? What 's it all about?
To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,
Wondered at? oh, this last of course! — you say.
But why not do as well as say, — paint these
Just as they are, careless what comes of it?
God's works — paint any one, and count it crime
To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works
Are here already; nature is complete:
Suppose you reproduce her — (which you can't)
There 's no advantage! you must beat her, then."
For, don't you mark? we 're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted — better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,
Your cullion's hanging face? A bit of chalk,
And trust me but you should, though! How much more,

If I drew higher things with the same truth!
That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,
Interpret God to all of you! Oh, oh,
It makes me mad to see what men shall do
And we in our graves! This world 's no blot for us,
Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good:
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.
"Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer!"
Strikes in the Prior: "when your meaning 's plain
It does not say to folk — remember matins,
Or, mind you fast next Friday!" Why, for this
What need of art at all? A skull and bones,
Two bits of stick nailed crosswise, or, what 's best,
A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.
I painted a Saint Laurence six months since
At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style:
"How looks my painting, now the scaffold 's down?"
I ask a brother: "Hugely," he returns —
"Already not one phiz of your three slaves
Who turn the Deacon off his toasted side,
But 's scratched and prodded to our heart's content,
The pious people have so eased their own
With coming to say prayers there in a rage:
We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.
Expect another job this time next year,
For pity and religion grow i' the crowd —
Your painting serves its purpose!" Hang the fools!

— That is — you 'll not mistake an idle word
Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,
Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!
Oh, the church knows! don't misreport me, now!
It 's natural a poor monk out of bounds
Should have his apt word to excuse himself:
And hearken how I plot to make amends.
I have bethought me: I shall paint a piece
. . . There 's for you! Give me six months, then go, see
Something in Sant' Ambrogio's! Bless the nuns!
They want a cast o' my office. I shall paint
God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
Ringed by a bowery, flowery angel-brood,
Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
As puff on puff of grated orris-root
When ladies crowd to church at midsummer.
And then i' the front, of course a saint or two —

Saint John, because he saves the Florentines,
Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white
The convent's friends and gives them a long day,
And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
The man of Uz (and Us without the z,
Painters who need his patience). Well, all these
Secured at their devotion, up shall come
Out of a corner when you least expect,
As one by a dark stair into a great light,
Music and talking, who but Lippo! I! —
Mazed, motionless, and moonstruck — I 'm the man!
Back I shrink — what is this I see and hear?
I, caught up with my monk's-things by mistake,
My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,
I, in this presence, this pure company!
Where 's a hole, where 's a corner for escape?
Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing
Forward, puts out a soft palm — "Not so fast!"
— Addresses the celestial presence, "nay —
He made you and devised you, after all,
Though he 's none of you! Could Saint John there draw —
His camel-hair make up a painting-brush?
We come to brother Lippo for all that,
Iste perfecit opus!" So, all smile —
I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
Under the cover of a hundred wings
Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you 're gay
And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off
To some safe bench behind, not letting go
The palm of her, the little lily thing
That spoke the good word for me in the nick,
Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would say.
And so all 's saved for me, and for the church
A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence!
Your hand, sir, and good-bye: no lights, no lights!
The street 's hushed, and I know my own way back,
Don't fear me! There 's the gray beginning. Zooks!

ANDREA DEL SARTO.

CALLED "THE FAULTLESS PAINTER."

But do not let us quarrel any more,
No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once:
Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.
You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?
I 'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,
Treat his own subject after his own way,
Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
And shut the money into this small hand
When next it takes mine. Will it? tenderly?
Oh, I 'll content him, — but to-morrow, Love!
I often am much wearier than you think,
This evening more than usual, and it seems
As if — forgive now — should you let me sit
Here by the window with your hand in mine
And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole,
Both of one mind, as married people use,
Quietly, quietly the evening through,
I might get up to-morrow to my work
Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this!
Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.
Don't count the time lost, neither; you must serve
For each of the five pictures we require:
It saves a model. So! keep looking so —
My serpentining beauty, rounds on rounds!
— How could you ever prick those perfect ears,
Even to put the pearl there! oh, so sweet —
My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
Which everybody looks on and calls his,
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
While she looks — no one's: very dear, no less.
You smile? why, there 's my picture ready made,
There 's what we painters call our harmony!
A common grayness silvers everything, —
All in a twilight, you and I alike
— You, at the point of your first pride in me
(That 's gone you know), — but I, at every point;
My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
There 's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;

That length of convent-wall across the way
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape
As if I saw alike my work and self
And all that I was born to be and do,
A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.
How strange now looks the life he makes us lead;
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!
I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!
This chamber for example — turn your head —
All that 's behind us! You don't understand
Nor care to understand about my art,
But you can hear at least when people speak:
And that cartoon, the second from the door
— It is the thing, Love! so such things should be —
Behold Madonna! — I am bold to say.
I can do with my pencil what I know,
What I see, what at bottom of my heart
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep —
Do easily, too — when I say, perfectly,
I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are judge,
Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,
And just as much they used to say in France.
At any rate 't is easy, all of it!
No sketches first, no studies, that 's long past:
I do what many dream of all their lives,
— Dream? strive to do, and agonize to do,
And fail in doing. I could count twenty such
On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
Who strive — you don't know how the others strive
To paint a little thing like that you smeared
Carelessly passing with your robes afloat, —
Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,
(I know his name, no matter) — so much less!
Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.
There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,
Reach many a time a heaven that 's shut to me,
Enter and take their place there sure enough,
Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.

The sudden blood of these men! at a word —
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.
I, painting from myself and to myself,
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,
Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that?
Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?
Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what 's a heaven for? All is silver-gray
Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!
I know both what I want and what might gain,
And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
"Had I been two, another and myself,
Our head would have o'erlooked the world!" No doubt.
Yonder 's a work now, of that famous youth
The Urbinate who died five years ago.
('T is copied, George Vasari sent it me.)
Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
Above and through his art — for it gives way;
That arm is wrongly put — and there again —
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,
He means right — that, a child may understand.
Still, what an arm! and I could alter it:
But all the play, the insight and the stretch —
Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out?
Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you!
Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think —
More than I merit, yes, by many times.
But had you — oh, with the same perfect brow,
And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare —
Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!
Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged,
"God and the glory! never care for gain.
The present by the future, what is that?
Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo!
Rafael is waiting: up to God, all three!"
I might have done it for you. So it seems:
Perhaps not. All is as God overrules.

Beside, incentives come from the soul's self;
The rest avail not. Why do I need you?
What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo?
In this world, who can do a thing, will not;
And who would do it, cannot, I perceive:
Yet the will 's somewhat — somewhat, too, the power —
And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,
God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.
'T is safer for me, if the award be strict,
That I am something underrated here,
Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.
I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,
For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.
The best is when they pass and look aside;
But they speak sometimes; I must bear it all.
Well may they speak! That Francis, that first time,
And that long festal year at Fontainebleau!
I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
In that humane great monarch's golden look, —
One finger in his beard or twisted curl
Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
I painting proudly with his breath on me,
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts, —
And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
This in the background, waiting on my work,
To crown the issue with a last reward!
A good time, was it not, my kingly days?
And had you not grown restless . . . but I know —
'T is done and past; 't was right, my instinct said;
Too live the life grew, golden and not gray,
And I 'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.
How could it end in any other way?
You called me, and I came home to your heart.
The triumph was — to reach and stay there; since
I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?
Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,
You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!
"Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;
The Roman's is the better when you pray,
But still the other's Virgin was his wife" —

Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge
Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows
My better fortune, I resolve to think.
For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,
Said one day Agnolo, his very self,
To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .
(When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
Too lifted up in heart because of it)
"Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub
Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,
Who, were he set to plan and execute
As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,
Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!"
To Rafael's! — And indeed the arm is wrong.
I hardly dare . . . yet, only you to see,
Give the chalk here — quick, thus the line should go!
Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!
Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
(What he? why, who but Michel Agnolo?
Do you forget already words like those?)
If really there was such a chance, so lost, —
Is, whether you're — not grateful — but more pleased.
Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!
This hour has been an hour! Another smile?
If you would sit thus by me every night
I should work better, do you comprehend?
I mean that I should earn more, give you more.
See, it is settled dusk now; there's a star;
Morello's gone, the watch-lights show the wall,
The cue-owls speak the name we call them by.
Come from the window, love, — come in, at last,
Inside the melancholy little house
We built to be so gay with. God is just.
King Francis may forgive me: oft at nights
When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
The walls become illumined, brick from brick
Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
That gold of his I did cement them with!
Let us but love each other. Must you go?
That Cousin here again? he waits outside?
Must see you — you, and not with me? Those loans?
More gaming debts to pay? you smiled for that?
Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to spend?
While hand and eye and something of a heart
Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it worth?

I 'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit
The gray remainder of the evening out,
Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly
How I could paint, were I but back in France,
One picture, just one more — the Virgin's face,
Not yours this time! I want you at my side
To hear them — that is, Michel Agnolo —
Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.
Will you? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.
I take the subjects for his corridor,
Finish the portrait out of hand — there, there,
And throw him in another thing or two
If he demurs; the whole should prove enough
To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,
What 's better and what 's all I care about,
Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff!
Love, does that please you? Ah, but what does he,
The Cousin! what does he to please you more?

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.
I regret little, I would change still less.
Since there my past life lies, why alter it?
The very wrong to Francis! — it is true
I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
And built this house and sinned, and all is said.
My father and my mother died of want.
Well, had I riches of my own? you see
How one gets rich! Let each one bear his lot.
They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died:
And I have labored somewhat in my time
And not been paid profusely. Some good son
Paint my two hundred pictures — let him try!
No doubt, there 's something strikes a balance. Yes,
You loved me quite enough, it seems to-night.
This must suffice me here. What would one have?
In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance —
Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
To cover — the three first without a wife,
While I have mine! So — still they overcome
Because there 's still Lucrezia, — as I choose.

Again the Cousin's whistle! Go, my Love.

THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB AT SAINT PRAXED'S CHURCH.

Rome, 15—.

Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!
Draw round my bed: is Anselm keeping back?
Nephews — sons mine . . . ah God, I know not! Well —
She, men would have to be your mother once,
Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was!
What 's done is done, and she is dead beside,
Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,
And as she died so must we die ourselves,
And thence ye may perceive the world 's a dream.
Life, how and what is it? As here I lie
In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,
Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask
"Do I live, am I dead?" Peace, peace seems all.
Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace;
And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought
With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know:
— Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care;
Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South
He graced his carrion with, God curse the same!
Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence
One sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side,
And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,
And up into the aery dome where live
The angels, and a sunbeam 's sure to lurk:
And I shall fill my slab of basalt there,
And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,
With those nine columns round me, two and two,
The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands:
Peach-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe
As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse.
— Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,
Put me where I may look at him! True peach,
Rosy and flawless: how I earned the prize!
Draw close: that conflagration of my church
— What then? So much was saved if aught were missed!
My sons, ye would not be my death? Go dig
The white-grape vineyard where the oil-press stood,
Drop water gently till the surface sink,
And if ye find . . . Ah God, I know not, I! . . .
Bedded in store of rotten fig-leaves soft,

And corded up in a tight olive-frail,
Some lump, ah God, of *lapis lazuli*,
Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,
Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast . . .
Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all,
That brave Frascati villa with its bath,
So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,
Like God the Father's globe on both his hands
Ye worship in the Jesu Church so gay,
For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst!
Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years:
Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?
Did I say basalt for my slab, sons? Black —
'T was ever antique-black I meant! How else
Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath?
The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,
Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,
And Moses with the tables . . . but I know
Ye mark me not! What do they whisper thee,
Child of my bowels, Anselm? Ah, ye hope
To revel down my villas while I gasp
Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine
Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at!
Nay, boys, ye love me — all of jasper, then!
'T is jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve
My bath must needs be left behind, alas!
One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,
There 's plenty jasper somewhere in the world —
And have I not Saint Praxed's ear to pray
Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs?
— That 's if ye carve my epitaph aright,
Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line —
Tully, my masters? Ulpian serves his need!
And then how I shall lie through centuries,
And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
And see God made and eaten all day long,
And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
Good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke!
For as I lie here, hours of the dead night,
Dying in state and by such slow degrees,

I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,
And let the bedclothes, for a mortcloth, drop
Into great laps and folds of sculptor's-work:
And as yon tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts
Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,
About the life before I lived this life,
And this life too, popes, cardinals and priests,
Saint Praxed at his sermon on the mount,
Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes,
And new-found agate urns as fresh as day,
And marble's language, Latin pure, discreet,
— Aha, ELUCESCEBAT quoth our friend?
No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best!
Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.
All *lapis*, all, sons! Else I give the Pope
My villas! Will ye ever eat my heart?
Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,
They glitter like your mother's for my soul,
Or ye would heighten my impoverished frieze,
Piece out its starved design, and fill my vase
With grapes, and add a visor and a Term,
And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx
That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down,
To comfort me on my entablature
Whereon I am to lie till I must ask
"Do I live, am I dead?" There, leave me, there!
For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
To death — ye wish it — God, ye wish it! Stone —
Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which sweat
As if the corpse they keep were oozing through —
And no more *lapis* to delight the world!
Well, go! I bless ye. Fewer tapers there,
But in a row: and, going, turn your backs
— Ay, like departing altar-ministrants,
And leave me in my church, the church for peace,
That I may watch at leisure if he leers —
Old Gandolf, at me, from his onion-stone,
As still he envied me, so fair she was!

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY.

No more wine? then we 'll push back chairs and talk.
A final glass for me, though: cool, i' faith!
We ought to have our Abbey back, you see.

It 's different, preaching in basilicas,
And doing duty in some masterpiece
Like this of brother Pugin's, bless his heart!
I doubt if they 're half baked, those chalk rosettes,
Ciphers and stucco-twiddlings everywhere;
It 's just like breathing in a lime-kiln: eh?
These hot long ceremonies of our church
Cost us a little — oh, they pay the price,
You take me — amply pay it! Now, we 'll talk.

So, you despise me, Mr. Gigadibs.
No deprecation, — nay, I beg you, sir!
Beside 't is our engagement: don't you know,
I promised, if you 'd watch a dinner out,
We 'd see truth dawn together? — truth that peeps
Over the glasses' edge when dinner 's done,
And body gets its sop and holds its noise
And leaves soul free a little. Now 's the time:
Truth's break of day! You do despise me then.
And if I say, " despise me," — never fear!
I know you do not in a certain sense —
Not in my arm-chair, for example: here,
I well imagine you respect my place
(*Status*, *entourage*, worldly circumstance)
Quite to its value — very much indeed:
— Are up to the protesting eyes of you
In pride at being seated here for once —
You 'll turn it to such capital account!
When somebody, through years and years to come,
Hints of the bishop, — names me — that 's enough:
"Blougram? I knew him" — (into it you slide)
"Dined with him once, a Corpus Christi Day,
All alone, we two; he 's a clever man:
And after dinner, — why, the wine you know, —
Oh, there was wine, and good! — what with the wine . .
'Faith, we began upon all sorts of talk!
He 's no bad fellow, Blougram; he had seen
Something of mine he relished, some review:
He 's quite above their humbug in his heart,
Half-said as much, indeed — the thing 's his trade.
I warrant, Blougram 's sceptical at times:
How otherwise? I liked him, I confess!"
Che che, my dear sir, as we say at Rome,
Don't you protest now! It 's fair give and take;
You have had your turn and spoken your home-truths:
The hand 's mine now, and here you follow suit.

Thus much conceded, still the first fact stays —
You do despise me; your ideal of life
Is not the bishop's: you would not be I.
You would like better to be Goethe, now,
Or Buonaparte, or, bless me, lower still,
Count D'Orsay, — so you did what you preferred,
Spoke as you thought, and, as you cannot help,
Believed or disbelieved, no matter what,
So long as on that point, whate'er it was,
You loosed your mind, were whole and sole yourself.
— That, my ideal never can include,
Upon that element of truth and worth
Never be based! for say they make me Pope —
(They can't — suppose it for our argument!)
Why, there I 'm at my tether's end, I 've reached
My height, and not a height which pleases you:
An unbelieving Pope won't do, you say.
It 's like those eerie stories nurses tell,
Of how some actor on a stage played Death,
With pasteboard crown, sham orb and tinselled dart,
And called himself the monarch of the world;
Then, going in the tire-room afterward,
Because the play was done, to shift himself,
Got touched upon the sleeve familiarly,
The moment he had shut the closet door,
By Death himself. Thus God might touch a Pope
At unawares, ask what his baubles mean,
And whose part he presumed to play just now?
Best be yourself, imperial, plain and true!

So, drawing comfortable breath again,
You weigh and find, whatever more or less
I boast of my ideal realized,
Is nothing in the balance when opposed
To your ideal, your grand simple life,
Of which you will not realize one jot.
I am much, you are nothing; you would be all,
I would be merely much: you beat me there.

No, friend, you do not beat me: hearken why!
The common problem, yours, mine, every one's,
Is — not to fancy what were fair in life
Provided it could be, — but, finding first
What may be, then find how to make it fair
Up to our means: a very different thing!
No abstract intellectual plan of life

Quite irrespective of life's plainest laws,
But one, a man, who is man and nothing more,
May lead within a world which (by your leave)
Is Rome or London, not Fool's-paradise.
Embellish Rome, idealize away,
Make paradise of London if you can,
You 're welcome, nay, you 're wise.

A simile!
We mortals cross the ocean of this world
Each in his average cabin of a life;
The best 's not big, the worst yields elbow-room.
Now for our six months' voyage — how prepare?
You come on shipboard with a landsman's list
Of things he calls convenient: so they are!
An India screen is pretty furniture,
A piano-forte is a fine resource,
All Balzac's novels occupy one shelf,
The new edition fifty volumes long;
And little Greek books, with the funny type
They get up well at Leipsic, fill the next:
Go on! slabbed marble, what a bath it makes!
And Parma's pride, the Jerome, let us add!
'T were pleasant could Correggio's fleeting glow
Hang full in face of one where'er one roams,
Since he more than the others brings with him
Italy's self, — the marvellous Modenese! —
Yet was not on your list before, perhaps.
— Alas, friend, here 's the agent . . . is 't the name?
The captain, or whoever 's master here —
You see him screw his face up; what 's his cry
Ere you set foot on shipboard? "Six feet square!"
If you won't understand what six feet mean,
Compute and purchase stores accordingly —
And if, in pique because he overhauls
Your Jerome, piano, bath, you come on board
Bare — why, you cut a figure at the first
While sympathetic landsmen see you off;
Not afterward, when long ere half seas over,
You peep up from your utterly naked boards
Into some snug and well-appointed berth,
Like mine for instance (try the cooler jug —
Put back the other, but don't jog the ice!)
And mortified you mutter, "Well and good;
He sits enjoying his sea-furniture;
'T is stout and proper, and there 's store of it:

Though I 've the better notion, all agree,
Of fitting rooms up. Hang the carpenter,
Neat ship-shape fixings and contrivances —
I would have brought my Jerome, frame and all!"
And meantime you bring nothing: never mind —
You 've proved your artist-nature: what you don't
You might bring, so despise me, as I say.

Now come, let 's backward to the starting-place.
See my way: we 're two college friends, suppose.
Prepare together for our voyage, then;
Each note and check the other in his work, —
Here 's mine, a bishop's outfit; criticise!
What 's wrong? why won't you be a bishop too?

Why first, you don't believe, you don't and can't,
(Not statedly, that is, and fixedly
And absolutely and exclusively)
In any revelation called divine.
No dogmas nail your faith; and what remains
But say so, like the honest man you are?
First, therefore, overhaul theology!
Nay, I too, not a fool, you please to think,
Must find believing every whit as hard:
And if I do not frankly say as much,
The ugly consequence is clear enough.

Now wait, my friend: well, I do not believe —
If you 'll accept no faith that is not fixed,
Absolute and exclusive, as you say.
You 're wrong — I mean to prove it in due time.
Meanwhile, I know where difficulties lie
I could not, cannot solve, nor ever shall,
So give up hope accordingly to solve —
(To you, and over the wine). Our dogmas then
With both of us, though in unlike degree,
Missing full credence — overboard with them!
I mean to meet you on your own premise:
Good, there go mine in company with yours!

And now what are we? unbelievers both,
Calm and complete, determinately fixed
To-day, to-morrow, and forever, pray?
You 'll guarantee me that? Not so, I think!
In no wise! all we 've gained is, that belief,
As unbelief before, shakes us by fits,

Confounds us like its predecessor. Where 's
The gain? how can we guard our unbelief,
Make it bear fruit to us? — the problem here.
Just when we are safest, there 's a sunset-touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
A chorus-ending from Euripides, —
And that 's enough for fifty hopes and fears
As old and new at once as nature's self,
To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
Round the ancient idol, on his base again, —
The grand Perhaps! We look on helplessly.
There the old misgivings, crooked questions are —
This good God, — what he could do, if he would,
Would, if he could — then must have done long since:
If so, when, where and how? some way must be, —
Once feel about, and soon or late you hit
Some sense, in which it might be, after all.
Why not, "The Way, the Truth, the Life?"

— That way
Over the mountain, which who stands upon
Is apt to doubt if it be meant for a road;
While, if he views it from the waste itself,
Up goes the line there, plain from base to brow,
Not vague, mistakable! what 's a break or two
Seen from the unbroken desert either side?
And then (to bring in fresh philosophy)
What if the breaks themselves should prove at last
The most consummate of contrivances
To train a man's eye, teach him what is faith?
And so we stumble at truth's very test!
All we have gained then by our unbelief
Is a life of doubt diversified by faith,
For one of faith diversified by doubt:
We called the chess-board white, — we call it black.

"Well," you rejoin, "the end 's no worse, at least;
We 've reason for both colors on the board:
Why not confess then, where I drop the faith
And you the doubt, that I 'm as right as you?"

Because, friend, in the next place, this being so,
And both things even, — faith and unbelief
Left to a man's choice, — we 'll proceed a step,
Returning to our image, which I like.

A man's choice, yes — but a cabin-passenger's —
The man made for the special life o' the world —
Do you forget him? I remember though!
Consult our ship's conditions and you find
One and but one choice suitable to all;
The choice, that you unluckily prefer,
Turning things topsy-turvy — they or it
Going to the ground. Belief or unbelief
Bears upon life, determines its whole course,
Begins at its beginning. See the world
Such as it is, — you made it not, nor I;
I mean to take it as it is, — and you,
Not so you 'll take it, — though you get nought else.
I know the special kind of life I like,
What suits the most my idiosyncrasy,
Brings out the best of me and bears me fruit
In power, peace, pleasantness and length of days.
I find that positive belief does this
For me, and unbelief, no whit of this.
— For you, it does, however? — that, we 'll try!
'T is clear, I cannot lead my life, at least,
Induce the world to let me peaceably,
Without declaring at the outset, "Friends,
I absolutely and peremptorily
Believe!" — I say, faith is my waking life:
One sleeps, indeed, and dreams at intervals,
We know, but waking 's the main point with us,
And my provision 's for life's waking part.
Accordingly, I use heart, head and hand
All day, I build, scheme, study, and make friends;
And when night overtakes me, down I lie,
Sleep, dream a little, and get done with it,
The sooner the better, to begin afresh.
What 's midnight doubt before the dayspring's faith?
You, the philosopher, that disbelieve,
That recognize the night, give dreams their weight —
To be consistent you should keep your bed,
Abstain from healthy acts that prove you man,
For fear you drowse perhaps at unawares!
And certainly at night you 'll sleep and dream,
Live through the day and bustle as you please.
And so you live to sleep as I to wake,
To unbelieve as I to still believe?
Well, and the common sense o' the world calls you
Bed-ridden, — and its good things come to me.
Its estimation, which is half the fight,

That 's the first-cabin comfort I secure:
The next . . . but you perceive with half an eye!
Come, come, it 's best believing, if we may;
You can't but own that!

Next, concede again,
If once we choose belief, on all accounts
We can't be too decisive in our faith,
Conclusive and exclusive in its terms,
To suit the world which gives us the good things.
In every man's career are certain points
Whereon he dares not be indifferent;
The world detects him clearly, if he dare,
As baffled at the game, and losing life.
He may care little or he may care much
For riches, honor, pleasure, work, repose,
Since various theories of life and life's
Success are extant which might easily
Comport with either estimate of these;
And whoso chooses wealth or poverty,
Labor or quiet, is not judged a fool
Because his fellow would choose otherwise:
We let him choose upon his own account
So long as he 's consistent with his choice.
But certain points, left wholly to himself,
When once a man has arbitrated on,
We say he must succeed there or go hang.
Thus, he should wed the woman he loves most
Or needs most, whatsoe'er the love or need —
For he can't wed twice. Then, he must avouch,
Or follow, at the least, sufficiently,
The form of faith his conscience holds the best,
Whate'er the process of conviction was:
For nothing can compensate his mistake
On such a point, the man himself being judge:
He cannot wed twice, nor twice lose his soul.

Well now, there 's one great form of Christian faith
I happened to be born in — which to teach
Was given me as I grew up, on all hands,
As best and readiest means of living by;
The same on examination being proved
The most pronounced moreover, fixed, precise
And absolute form of faith in the whole world —
Accordingly, most potent of all forms
For working on the world. Observe, my friend!

Such as you know me, I am free to say,
In these hard latter days which hamper one,
Myself — by no immoderate exercise
Of intellect and learning, but the tact
To let external forces work for me,
— Bid the street's stones be bread and they are bread;
Bid Peter's creed, or rather, Hildebrand's,
Exalt me o'er my fellows in the world
And make my life an ease and joy and pride;
It does so, — which for me 's a great point gained,
Who have a soul and body that exact
A comfortable care in many ways.
There 's power in me and will to dominate
Which I must exercise, they hurt me else:
In many ways I need mankind's respect,
Obedience, and the love that 's born of fear:
While at the same time, there 's a taste I have,
A toy of soul, a titillating thing,
Refuses to digest these dainties crude.
The naked life is gross till clothed upon:
I must take what men offer, with a grace
As though I would not, could I help it, take!
An uniform I wear though over-rich —
Something imposed on me, no choice of mine;
No fancy-dress worn for pure fancy's sake
And despicable therefore! now folk kneel
And kiss my hand — of course the Church's hand.
Thus I am made, thus life is best for me,
And thus that it should be I have procured;
And thus it could not be another way,
I venture to imagine.

You'll reply,
So far my choice, no doubt, is a success;
But were I made of better elements,
With nobler instincts, purer tastes, like you,
I hardly would account the thing success
Though it did all for me I say.

But, friend,
We speak of what is; not of what might be,
And how 't were better if 't were otherwise.
I am the man you see here plain enough:
Grant I 'm a beast, why, beasts must lead beasts' lives!
Suppose I own at once to tail and claws;
The tailless man exceeds me: but being tailed

I 'll lash out lion fashion, and leave apes
To dock their stump and dress their haunches up.
My business is not to remake myself,
But make the absolute best of what God made.
Or — our first simile — though you prove me doomed
To a viler berth still, to the steerage-hole,
The sheep-pen or the pig-sty, I should strive
To make what use of each were possible;
And as this cabin gets upholstery,
That hutch should rustle with sufficient straw.

But, friend, I don't acknowledge quite so fast
I fail of all your manhood's lofty tastes
Enumerated so complacently,
On the mere ground that you forsooth can find
In this particular life I choose to lead
No fit provision for them. Can you not?
Say you, my fault is I address myself
To grosser estimators than should judge?
And that 's no way of holding up the soul,
Which, nobler, needs men's praise perhaps, yet knows
One wise man's verdict outweighs all the fools' —
Would like the two, but, forced to choose, takes that.
I pine among my million imbeciles
(You think) aware some dozen men of sense
Eye me and know me, whether I believe
In the last winking Virgin, as I vow,
And am a fool, or disbelieve in her
And am a knave, — approve in neither case,
Withhold their voices though I look their way:
Like Verdi when, at his worst opera's end
(The thing they gave at Florence, — what 's its name?)
While the mad houseful's plaudits near out-bang
His orchestra of salt-box, tongs, and bones,
He looks through all the roaring and the wreaths
Where sits Rossini patient in his stall.

Nay, friend, I meet you with an answer here —
That even your prime men who appraise their kind
Are men still, catch a wheel within a wheel,
See more in a truth than the truth's simple self,
Confuse themselves. You see lads walk the street
Sixty the minute; what 's to note in that?
You see one lad o'erstride a chimney-stack;
Him you must watch — he 's sure to fall, yet stands!
Our interest 's on the dangerous edge of things.

The honest thief, the tender murderer,
The superstitious atheist, demirep
That loves and saves her soul in new French books —
We watch while these in equilibrium keep
The giddy line midway: one step aside,
They 're classed and done with. I, then, keep the line
Before your sages, — just the men to shrink
From the gross weights, coarse scales and labels broad
You offer their refinement. Fool or knave?
Why needs a bishop be a fool or knave
When there 's a thousand diamond weights between?
So, I enlist them. Your picked twelve, you 'll find,
Profess themselves indignant, scandalized
At thus being held unable to explain
How a superior man who disbelieves
May not believe as well: that 's Schelling's way!
It 's through my coming in the tail of time,
Nicking the minute with a happy tact.
Had I been born three hundred years ago
They 'd say, "What 's strange? Blougram of course believes;"
And, seventy years since, "disbelieves of course."
But now, "He may believe; and yet, and yet
How can he?" All eyes turn with interest.
Whereas, step off the line on either side —
You, for example, clever to a fault,
The rough and ready man who write apace,
Read somewhat seldomer, think perhaps even less —
You disbelieve! Who wonders and who cares?
Lord So-and-so — his coat bedropped with wax,
All Peter's chains about his waist, his back
Brave with the needlework of Noodledom —
Believes! Again, who wonders and who cares?
But I, the man of sense and learning too,
The able to think yet act, the this, the that,
I, to believe at this late time of day!
Enough; you see, I need not fear contempt.

— Except it 's yours! Admire me as these may,
You don't. But whom at least do you admire?
Present your own perfection, your ideal,
Your pattern man for a minute — oh, make haste!
Is it Napoleon you would have us grow?
Concede the means; allow his head and hand,
(A large concession, clever as you are)
Good! In our common primal element

Of unbelief (we can't believe, you know —
We 're still at that admission, recollect !)
Where do you find — apart from, towering o'er
The secondary temporary aims
Which satisfy the gross taste you despise —
Where do you find his star ? — his crazy trust
God knows through what or in what ? it 's alive
And shines and leads him, and that 's all we want.
Have we aught in our sober night shall point
Such ends as his were, and direct the means
Of working out our purpose straight as his,
Nor bring a moment's trouble on success
With after-care to justify the same ?
— Be a Napoleon, and yet disbelieve —
Why, the man 's mad, friend, take his light away !
What 's the vague good o' the world, for which you dare
With comfort to yourself blow millions up ?
We neither of us see it ! we do see
The blown-up millions — spatter of their brains
And writhing of their bowels and so forth,
In that bewildering entanglement
Of horrible eventualities
Past calculation to the end of time !
Can I mistake for some clear word of God
(Which were my ample warrant for it all)
His puff of hazy instinct, idle talk,
"The State, that 's I," quack-nonsense about crowns,
And (when one beats the man to his last hold)
A vague idea of setting things to rights,
Policing people efficaciously,
More to their profit, most of all to his own ;
The whole to end that dismallest of ends
By an Austrian marriage, cant to us the Church,
And resurrection of the old régime ?
Would I, who hope to live a dozen years,
Fight Austerlitz for reasons such and such ?
No : for, concede me but the merest chance
Doubt may be wrong — there 's judgment, life to come !
With just that chance, I dare not. Doubt proves right ?
This present life is all ? — you offer me
Its dozen noisy years, without a chance
That wedding an archduchess, wearing lace,
And getting called by divers new-coined names,
Will drive off ugly thoughts and let me dine,
Sleep, read and chat in quiet as I like !
Therefore I will not.

Take another case;
Fit up the cabin yet another way.
What say you to the poets? shall we write
Hamlet, Othello — make the world our own,
Without a risk to run of either sort?
I can't! — to put the strongest reason first.
"But try," you urge, "the trying shall suffice;
The aim, if reached or not, makes great the life:
Try to be Shakespeare, leave the rest to fate!"
Spare my self-knowledge — there 's no fooling me!
If I prefer remaining my poor self,
I say so not in self-dispraise but praise.
If I 'm a Shakespeare, let the well alone;
Why should I try to be what now I am?
If I 'm no Shakespeare, as too probable, —
His power and consciousness and self-delight
And all we want in common, shall I find —
Trying forever? while on points of taste
Wherewith, to speak it humbly, he and I
Are dowered alike — I 'll ask you, I or he,
Which in our two lives realizes most?
Much, he imagined — somewhat, I possess.
He had the imagination; stick to that!
Let him say, "In the face of my soul's works
Your world is worthless and I touch it not
Lest I should wrong them" — I 'll withdraw my plea.
But does he say so? look upon his life!
Himself, who only can, gives judgment there.
He leaves his towers and gorgeous palaces
To build the trimmest house in Stratford town;
Saves money, spends it, owns the worth of things,
Giulio Romano's pictures, Dowland's lute;
Enjoys a show, respects the puppets, too,
And none more, had he seen its entry once,
Than "Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal."
Why then should I who play that personage,
The very Pandulph Shakespeare's fancy made,
Be told that had the poet chanced to start
From where I stand now (some degree like mine
Being just the goal he ran his race to reach)
He would have run the whole race back, forsooth,
And left being Pandulph, to begin write plays?
Ah, the earth's best can be but the earth's best!
Did Shakespeare live, he could but sit at home
And get himself in dreams the Vatican,
Greek busts, Venetian paintings, Roman walls,

And English books, none equal to his own,
Which I read, bound in gold (he never did).
— Terni's fall, Naples' bay, and Gothard's top —
Eh, friend? I could not fancy one of these;
But, as I pour this claret, there they are:
I 've gained them — crossed St. Gothard last July
With ten mules to the carriage and a bed
Slung inside; is my hap the worse for that?
We want the same things, Shakespeare and myself,
And what I want, I have: he, gifted more,
Could fancy he too had them when he liked,
But not so thoroughly that, if fate allowed,
He would not have them also in my sense.
We play one game; I send the ball aloft
No less adroitly that of fifty strokes
Scarce five go o'er the wall so wide and high
Which sends them back to me: I wish and get.
He struck balls higher and with better skill,
But at a poor fence level with his head,
And hit — his Stratford house, a coat of arms,
Successful dealings in his grain and wool, —
While I receive heaven's incense in my nose
And style myself the cousin of Queen Bess.
Ask him, if this life 's all, who wins the game?

Believe — and our whole argument breaks up.
Enthusiasm 's the best thing, I repeat;
Only, we can't command it; fire and life
Are all, dead matter 's nothing, we agree:
And be it a mad dream or God's very breath,
The fact's the same, — belief's fire, once in us,
Makes of all else mere stuff to show itself:
We penetrate our life with such a glow
As fire lends wood and iron — this turns steel,
That burns to ash — all 's one, fire proves its power
For good or ill, since men call flare success.
But paint a fire, it will not therefore burn.
Light one in me, I 'll find it food enough!
Why, to be Luther — that 's a life to lead,
Incomparably better than my own.
He comes, reclaims God's earth for God, he says,
Sets up God's rule again by simple means,
Reopens a shut book, and all is done.
He flared out in the flaring of mankind;
Such Luther's luck was: how shall such be mine?
If he succeeded, nothing 's left to do:

And if he did not altogether — well,
Strauss is the next advance. All Strauss should be
I might be also. But to what result?
He looks upon no future: Luther did.
What can I gain on the denying side?
Ice makes no conflagration. State the facts,
Read the text right, emancipate the world —
The emancipated world enjoys itself
With scarce a thank-you: Blougram told it first
It could not owe a farthing, — not to him
More than Saint Paul! 't would press its pay, you think?
Then add there 's still that plaguy hundredth chance
Strauss may be wrong. And so a risk is run —
For what gain? not for Luther's, who secured
A real heaven in his heart throughout his life,
Supposing death a little altered things.

"Ay, but since really you lack faith," you cry,
"You run the same risk really on all sides,
In cool indifference as bold unbelief.
As well be Strauss as swing 'twixt Paul and him.
It 's not worth having, such imperfect faith,
No more available to do faith's work
Than unbelief like mine. Whole faith, or none!"

Softly, my friend! I must dispute that point.
Once own the use of faith, I 'll find you faith.
We 're back on Christian ground. You call for faith:
I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists.
The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,
If faith o'ercomes doubt. How I know it does?
By life and man's free will, God gave for that!
To mould life as we choose it, shows our choice:
That 's our one act, the previous work 's his own.
You criticise the soul? it reared this tree —
This broad life and whatever fruit it bears!
What matter though I doubt at every pore,
Head-doubts, heart-doubts, doubts at my fingers' ends,
Doubts in the trivial work of every day,
Doubts at the very bases of my soul
In the grand moments when she probes herself —
If finally I have a life to show,
The thing I did, brought out in evidence
Against the thing done to me underground
By hell and all its brood, for aught I know?
I say, whence sprang this? shows it faith or doubt?

All 's doubt in me ; where 's break of faith in this ?
It is the idea, the feeling and the love,
God means mankind should strive for and show forth
Whatever be the process to that end, —
And not historic knowledge, logic sound,
And metaphysical acumen, sure!
"What think ye of Christ," friend ? when all 's done and said,
Like you this Christianity or not ?
It may be false, but will you wish it true ?
Has it your vote to be so if it can ?
Trust you an instinct silenced long ago
That will break silence and enjoin you love
What mortified philosophy is hoarse,
And all in vain, with bidding you despise ?
If you desire faith — then you 've faith enough :
What else seeks God — nay, what else seek ourselves ?
You form a notion of me, we 'll suppose,
On hearsay ; it 's a favorable one :
"But still" (you add), "there was no such good man,
Because of contradiction in the facts.
One proves, for instance, he was born in Rome,
This Blougram ; yet throughout the tales of him
I see he figures as an Englishman."
Well, the two things are reconcilable.
But would I rather you discovered that,
Subjoining — "Still, what matter though they be ?
Blougram concerns me nought, born here or there."

Pure faith indeed — you know not what you ask !
Naked belief in God the Omnipotent,
Omniscient, Omnipresent, sears too much
The sense of conscious creatures to be borne.
It were the seeing him, no flesh shall dare.
Some think, Creation 's meant to show him forth :
I say it 's meant to hide him all it can,
And that 's what all the blessed evil 's for.
Its use in Time is to environ us,
Our breath, our drop of dew, with shield enough
Against that sight till we can bear its stress.
Under a vertical sun, the exposed brain
And lidless eye and disemprisoned heart
Less certainly would wither up at once
Than mind, confronted with the truth of him.
But time and earth case-harden us to live ;
The feeblest sense is trusted most ; the child
Feels God a moment, ichors o'er the place,

Plays on and grows to be a man like us.
With me, faith means perpetual unbelief
Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.
Or, if that 's too ambitious, — here 's my box —
I need the excitation of a pinch
Threatening the torpor of the inside-nose
Nigh on the imminent sneeze that never comes.
"Leave it in peace," advise the simple folk:
Make it aware of peace by itching-fits,
Say I — let doubt occasion still more faith!

You 'll say, once all believed, man, woman, child,
In that dear middle-age these noodles praise.
How you 'd exult if I could put you back
Six hundred years, blot out cosmogony,
Geology, ethnology, what not
(Greek endings, each the little passing-bell
That signifies some faith 's about to die),
And set you square with Genesis again, —
When such a traveller told you his last news,
He saw the ark a-top of Ararat
But did not climb there since 't was getting dusk
And robber-bands infest the mountain's foot!
How should you feel, I ask, in such an age,
How act? As other people felt and did;
With soul more blank than this decanter's knob,
Believe — and yet lie, kill, rob, fornicate,
Full in belief's face, like the beast you 'd be!

No, when the fight begins within himself,
A man 's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,
Satan looks up between his feet — both tug —
He 's left, himself, i' the middle: the soul wakes
And grows. Prolong that battle through his life!
Never leave growing till the life to come!
Here, we 've got callous to the Virgin's winks
That used to puzzle people wholesomely:
Men have outgrown the shame of being fools.
What are the laws of nature, not to bend
If the Church bid them? — brother Newman asks.
Up with the Immaculate Conception, then —
On to the rack with faith! — is my advice.
Will not that hurry us upon our knees,
Knocking our breasts, "It can't be — yet it shall!
Who am I, the worm, to argue with my Pope?

Low things confound the high things!" and so forth.
That 's better than acquitting God with grace
As some folk do. He 's tried — no case is proved,
Philosophy is lenient — he may go!

You 'll say, the old system 's not so obsolete
But men believe still: ay, but who and where?
King Bomba's lazzaroni foster yet
The sacred flame, so Antonelli writes;
But even of these, what ragamuffin-saint
Believes God watches him continually,
As he believes in fire that it will burn,
Or rain that it will drench him? Break fire's law,
Sin against rain, although the penalty
Be just a singe or soaking? "No," he smiles;
"Those laws are laws that can enforce themselves."

The sum of all is — yes, my doubt is great,
My faith 's still greater, then my faith 's enough.
I have read much, thought much, experienced much,
Yet would die rather than avow my fear
The Naples' liquefaction may be false,
When set to happen by the palace-clock
According to the clouds or dinner-time.
I hear you recommend, I might at least
Eliminate, decrassify my faith
Since I adopt it; keeping what I must
And leaving what I can — such points as this.
I won't — that is, I can't throw one away.
Supposing there 's no truth in what I hold
About the need of trial to man's faith,
Still, when you bid me purify the same,
To such a process I discern no end.
Clearing off one excrescence to see two,
There 's ever a next in size, now grown as big,
That meets the knife: I cut and cut again!
First cut the Liquefaction, what comes last
But Fichte's clever cut at God himself?
Experimentalize on sacred things!
I trust nor hand nor eye nor heart nor brain
To stop betimes: they all get drunk alike.
The first step, I am master not to take.

You 'd find the cutting-process to your taste
As much as leaving growths of lies unpruned,
Nor see more danger in it, — you retort.

Your taste 's worth mine; but my taste proves more wise
When we consider that the steadfast hold
On the extreme end of the chain of faith
Gives all the advantage, makes the difference
With the rough purblind mass we seek to rule:
We are their lords, or they are free of us,
Just as we tighten or relax our hold.
So, other matters equal, we 'll revert
To the first problem — which, if solved my way
And thrown into the balance, turns the scale —
How we may lead a comfortable life,
How suit our luggage to the cabin's size.

Of course you are remarking all this time
How narrowly and grossly I view life,
Respect the creature-comforts, care to rule
The masses, and regard complacently
"The cabin," in our old phrase. Well, I do.
I act for, talk for, live for this world now,
As this world prizes action, life and talk:
No prejudice to what next world may prove,
Whose new laws and requirements, my best pledge
To observe then, is that I observe these now,
Shall do hereafter what I do meanwhile.
Let us concede (gratuitously though)
Next life relieves the soul of body, yields
Pure spiritual enjoyment: well, my friend,
Why lose this life i' the meantime, since its use
May be to make the next life more intense?

Do you know, I have often had a dream
(Work it up in your next month's article)
Of man's poor spirit in its progress, still
Losing true life forever and a day
Through ever trying to be and ever being —
In the evolution of successive spheres —
Before its actual sphere and place of life,
Halfway into the next, which having reached,
It shoots with corresponding foolery
Halfway into the next still, on and off!
As when a traveller, bound from North to South,
Scouts fur in Russia: what 's its use in France?
In France spurns flannel: where 's its need in Spain?
In Spain drops cloth, too cumbrous for Algiers!
Linen goes next, and last the skin itself,
A superfluity at Timbuctoo.

When, through his journey, was the fool at ease?
I 'm at ease now, friend; worldly in this world,
I take and like its way of life; I think
My brothers, who administer the means,
Live better for my comfort — that 's good too;
And God, if he pronounce upon such life,
Approves my service, which is better still.
If he keep silence, — why, for you or me
Or that brute beast pulled-up in to-day's "Times,"
What odds is 't, save to ourselves, what life we lead?

You meet me at this issue: you declare, —
All special-pleading done with — truth is truth,
And justifies itself by undreamed ways.
You don't fear but it 's better, if we doubt,
To say so, act up to our truth perceived
However feebly. Do then, — act away!
'T is there I 'm on the watch for you. How one acts
Is, both of us agree, our chief concern:
And how you 'll act is what I fain would see
If, like the candid person you appear,
You dare to make the most of your life's scheme
As I of mine, live up to its full law
Since there 's no higher law that counterchecks.
Put natural religion to the test
You 've just demolished the revealed with — quick,
Down to the root of all that checks your will,
All prohibition to lie, kill and thieve,
Or even to be an atheistic priest!
Suppose a pricking to incontinence —
Philosophers deduce you chastity
Or shame, from just the fact that at the first
Whoso embraced a woman in the field,
Threw club down and forewent his brains beside,
So, stood a ready victim in the reach
Of any brother savage, club in hand;
Hence saw the use of going out of sight
In wood or cave to prosecute his loves:
I read this in a French book t' other day.
Does law so analyzed coerce you much?
Oh, men spin clouds of fuzz where matters end,
But you who reach where the first thread begins,
You 'll soon cut that! — which means you can, but won'
Through certain instincts, blind, unreasoned-out,
You dare not set aside, you can't tell why,
But there they are, and so you let them rule.

Then, friend, you seem as much a slave as I,
A liar, conscious coward and hypocrite,
Without the good the slave expects to get,
In case he has a master after all!
You own your instincts? why, what else do I,
Who want, am made for, and must have a God
Ere I can be aught, do aught? — no mere name
Want, but the true thing with what proves its truth,
To wit, a relation from that thing to me,
Touching from head to foot — which touch I feel,
And with it take the rest, this life of ours!
I live my life here; yours you dare not live.

— Not as I state it, who (you please subjoin)
Disfigure such a life and call it names,
While, to your mind, remains another way
For simple men: knowledge and power have rights,
But ignorance and weakness have rights too.
There needs no crucial effort to find truth
If here or there or anywhere about:
We ought to turn each side, try hard and see,
And if we can't, be glad we 've earned at least
The right, by one laborious proof the more,
To graze in peace earth's pleasant pasturage.
Men are not angels, neither are they brutes:
Something we may see, all we cannot see.
What need of lying? I say, I see all,
And swear to each detail the most minute
In what I think a Pan's face — you, mere cloud:
I swear I hear him speak and see him wink,
For fear, if once I drop the emphasis,
Mankind may doubt there 's any cloud at all.
You take the simple life — ready to see,
Willing to see (for no cloud 's worth a face) —
And leaving quiet what no strength can move,
And which, who bids you move? who has the right?
I bid you; but you are God's sheep, not mine:
"*Pastor est tui Dominus.*" You find
In this the pleasant pasture of our life
Much you may eat without the least offence,
Much you don't eat because your maw objects,
Much you would eat but that your fellow-flock
Open great eyes at you and even butt,
And thereupon you like your mates so well
You cannot please yourself, offending them;
Though when they seem exorbitantly sheep,

You weigh your pleasure with their butts and bleats
And strike the balance. Sometimes certain fears
Restrain you, real checks since you find them so;
Sometimes you please yourself and nothing checks:
And thus you graze through life with not one lie,
And like it best.

But do you, in truth's name?
If so, you beat — which means you are not I —
Who needs must make earth mine and feed my fill
Not simply unbutted at, unbickered with,
But motioned to the velvet of the sward
By those obsequious wethers' very selves.
Look at me, sir; my age is double yours:
At yours, I knew beforehand, so enjoyed,
What now I should be — as, permit the word,
I pretty well imagine your whole range
And stretch of tether twenty years to come.
We both have minds and bodies much alike:
In truth's name, don't you want my bishopric,
My daily bread, my influence, and my state?
You 're young. I 'm old; you must be old one day;
Will you find then, as I do hour by hour,
Women their lovers kneel to, who cut curls
From your fat lap-dog's ear to grace a brooch —
Dukes, who petition just to kiss your ring —
With much beside you know or may conceive?
Suppose we die to-night: well, here am I,
Such were my gains, life bore this fruit to me,
While writing all the same my articles
On music, poetry, the fictile vase
Found at Albano, chess, Anacreon's Greek.
But you — the highest honor in your life,
The thing you 'll crown yourself with, all your days,
Is — dining here and drinking this last glass
I pour you out in sign of amity
Before we part forever. Of your power
And social influence, worldly worth in short,
Judge what 's my estimation by the fact,
I do not condescend to enjoin, beseech,
Hint secrecy on one of all these words!
You 're shrewd and know that should you publish one
The world would brand the lie — my enemies first,
Who 'd sneer — "the bishop 's an arch-hypocrite
And knave perhaps, but not so frank a fool."
Whereas I should not dare for both my ears

Breathe one such syllable, smile one such smile,
Before the chaplain who reflects myself —
My shade 's so much more potent than your flesh.
What 's your reward, self-abnegating friend?
Stood you confessed of those exceptional
And privileged great natures that dwarf mine —
A zealot with a mad ideal in reach,
A poet just about to print his ode,
A statesman with a scheme to stop this war,
An artist whose religion is his art —
I should have nothing to object: such men
Carry the fire, all things grow warm to them,
Their drugget 's worth my purple, they beat me.
But you, — you 're just as little those as I —
You, Gigadibs, who, thirty years of age,
Write statedly for Blackwood's Magazine,
Believe you see two points in Hamlet's soul
Unseized by the Germans yet — which view you 'll print —
Meantime the best you have to show being still
That lively lightsome article we took
Almost for the true Dickens, — what 's its name?
"The Slum and Cellar, or Whitechapel life
Limned after dark!" it made me laugh, I know,
And pleased a month, and brought you in ten pounds.
— Success I recognize and compliment,
And therefore give you, if you choose, three words
(The card and pencil-scratch is quite enough)
Which whether here, in Dublin or New York,
Will get you, prompt as at my eyebrow's wink,
Such terms as never you aspired to get
In all our own reviews and some not ours.
Go write your lively sketches! be the first
"Blougram, or The Eccentric Confidence" —
Or better simply say, "The Outward-bound."
Why, men as soon would throw it in my teeth
As copy and quote the infamy chalked broad
About me on the church-door opposite.
You will not wait for that experience though,
I fancy, howsoever you decide,
To discontinue — not detesting, not
Defaming, but at least — despising me!

Over his wine so smiled and talked his hour
Sylvester Blougram, styled *in partibus*
Episcopus, nec non — (the deuce knows what

It 's changed to by our novel hierarchy)
With Gigadibs the literary man,
Who played with spoons, explored his plate's design,
And ranged the olive-stones about its edge,
While the great bishop rolled him out a mind
Long crumpled, till creased consciousness lay smooth.

For Blougram, he believed, say, half he spoke.
The other portion, as he shaped it thus
For argumentatory purposes,
He felt his foe was foolish to dispute.
Some arbitrary accidental thoughts
That crossed his mind, amusing because new,
He chose to represent as fixtures there,
Invariable convictions (such they seemed
Beside his interlocutor's loose cards
Flung daily down, and not the same way twice),
While certain hell-deep instincts, man's weak tongue
Is never bold to utter in their truth
Because styled hell-deep ('t is an old mistake
To place hell at the bottom of the earth),
He ignored these, — not having in readiness
Their nomenclature and philosophy :
He said true things, but called them by wrong names.
"On the whole," he thought, "I justify myself
On every point where cavillers like this
Oppugn my life : he tries one kind of fence,
I close, he 's worsted, that 's enough for him.
He 's on the ground : if ground should break away
I take my stand on, there 's a firmer yet
Beneath it, both of us may sink and reach.
His ground was over mine and broke the first :
So, let him sit with me this many a year ! "

He did not sit five minutes. Just a week
Sufficed his sudden healthy vehemence.
Something had struck him in the "Outward-bound"
Another way than Blougram's purpose was :
And having bought, not cabin-furniture
But settler's-implements (enough for three)
And started for Australia — there, I hope,
By this time he has tested his first plough,
And studied his last chapter of St. John.

CLEON.

"As certain also of your own poets have said" —

Cleon the poet (from the sprinkled isles,
Lily on lily, that o'erlace the sea,
And laugh their pride when the light wave lisps "Greece") —
To Protus in his Tyranny: much health!

They give thy letter to me, even now:
I read and seem as if I heard thee speak.
The master of thy galley still unlades
Gift after gift; they block my court at last
And pile themselves along its portico
Royal with sunset, like a thought of thee:
And one white she-slave from the group dispersed
Of black and white slaves (like the chequer-work
Pavement, at once my nation's work and gift,
Now covered with this settle-down of doves),
One lyric woman, in her crocus vest
Woven of sea-wools, with her two white hands
Commends to me the strainer and the cup
Thy lip hath bettered ere it blesses mine.

Well-counselled, king, in thy munificence!
For so shall men remark, in such an act
Of love for him whose song gives life its joy,
Thy recognition of the use of life;
Nor call thy spirit barely adequate
To help on life in straight ways, broad enough
For vulgar souls, by ruling and the rest.
Thou, in the daily building of thy tower, —
Whether in fierce and sudden spasms of toil,
Or through dim lulls of unapparent growth,
Or when the general work 'mid good acclaim
Climbed with the eye to cheer the architect, —
Didst ne'er engage in work for mere work's sake —
Hadst ever in thy heart the luring hope
Of some eventual rest a-top of it,
Whence, all the tumult of the building hushed,
Thou first of men might'st look out to the East:
The vulgar saw thy tower, thou sawest the sun.
For this, I promise on thy festival
To pour libation, looking o'er the sea,
Making this slave narrate thy fortunes, speak

Thy great words, and describe thy royal face —
Wishing thee wholly where Zeus lives the most,
Within the eventual element of calm.

Thy letter's first requirement meets me here.
It is as thou hast heard: in one short life
I, Cleon, have effected all those things
Thou wonderingly dost enumerate.
That epos on thy hundred plates of gold
Is mine, — and also mine the little chant,
So sure to rise from every fishing-bark
When, lights at prow, the seamen haul their net.
The image of the sun-god on the phare,
Men turn from the sun's self to see, is mine;
The Pœcile, o'er-storied its whole length,
As thou didst hear, with painting, is mine too.
I know the true proportions of a man
And woman also, not observed before;
And I have written three books on the soul,
Proving absurd all written hitherto,
And putting us to ignorance again.
For music, — why, I have combined the moods,
Inventing one. In brief, all arts are mine;
Thus much the people know and recognize,
Throughout our seventeen islands. Marvel not.
We of these latter days, with greater mind
Than our forerunners, since more composite,
Look not so great, beside their simple way,
To a judge who only sees one way at once,
One mind-point and no other at a time, —
Compares the small part of a man of us
With some whole man of the heroic age,
Great in his way — not ours, nor meant for ours.
And ours is greater, had we skill to know:
For, what we call this life of men on earth,
This sequence of the soul's achievements here
Being, as I find much reason to conceive,
Intended to be viewed eventually
As a great whole, not analyzed to parts,
But each part having reference to all, —
How shall a certain part, pronounced complete,
Endure effacement by another part?
Was the thing done? — then, what's to do again?
See, in the chequered pavement opposite,
Suppose the artist made a perfect rhomb,
And next a lozenge, then a trapezoid —

He did not overlay them, superimpose
The new upon the old and blot it out,
But laid them on a level in his work,
Making at last a picture; there it lies.
So, first the perfect separate forms were made,
The portions of mankind; and after, so,
Occurred the combination of the same.
For where had been a progress, otherwise?
Mankind, made up of all the single men, —
In such a synthesis the labor ends.
Now mark me! those divine men of old time
Have reached, thou sayest well, each at one point
The outside verge that rounds our faculty;
And where they reached, who can do more than reach?
It takes but little water just to touch
At some one point the inside of a sphere,
And, as we turn the sphere, touch all the rest
In due succession: but the finer air
Which not so palpably nor obviously,
Though no less universally, can touch
The whole circumference of that emptied sphere,
Fills it more fully than the water did;
Holds thrice the weight of water in itself
Resolved into a subtler element.
And yet the vulgar call the sphere first full
Up to the visible height — and after, void;
Not knowing air's more hidden properties.
And thus our soul, misknown, cries out to Zeus
To vindicate his purpose in our life:
Why stay we on the earth unless to grow?
Long since, I imaged, wrote the fiction out,
That he or other god descended here
And, once for all, showed simultaneously
What, in its nature, never can be shown,
Piecemeal or in succession; — showed, I say,
The worth both absolute and relative
Of all his children from the birth of time,
His instruments for all appointed work.
I now go on to image, — might we hear
The judgment which should give the due to each,
Show where the labor lay and where the ease,
And prove Zeus' self, the latent everywhere!
This is a dream: — but no dream, let us hope,
That years and days, the summers and the springs,
Follow each other with unwaning powers.
The grapes which dye thy wine are richer far,

Through culture, than the wild wealth of the rock;
The suave plum than the savage-tasted drupe;
The pastured honey-bee drops choicer sweet;
The flowers turn double, and the leaves turn flowers;
That young and tender crescent-moon, thy slave,
Sleeping above her robe as buoyed by clouds,
Refines upon the women of my youth.
What, and the soul alone deteriorates?
I have not chanted verse like Homer, no —
Nor swept string like Terpander, no — nor carved
And painted men like Phidias and his friend:
I am not great as they are, point by point.
But I have entered into sympathy
With these four, running these into one soul,
Who, separate, ignored each other's art.
Say, is it nothing that I know them all?
The wild flower was the larger; I have dashed
Rose-blood upon its petals, pricked its cup's
Honey with wine, and driven its seed to fruit,
And show a better flower if not so large:
I stand myself. Refer this to the gods
Whose gift alone it is! which, shall I dare
(All pride apart) upon the absurd pretext
That such a gift by chance lay in my hand,
Discourse of lightly or depreciate?
It might have fallen to another's hand: what then?
I pass too surely: let at least truth stay!

And next, of what thou followest on to ask.
This being with me as I declare, O king,
My works, in all these varicolored kinds,
So done by me, accepted so by men —
Thou askest, if (my soul thus in men's hearts)
I must not be accounted to attain
The very crown and proper end of life?
Inquiring thence how, now life closeth up,
I face death with success in my right hand:
Whether I fear death less than dost thyself
The fortunate of men? "For" (writest thou)
"Thou leavest much behind, while I leave nought.
Thy life stays in the poems men shall sing,
The pictures men shall study; while my life,
Complete and whole now in its power and joy,
Dies altogether with my brain and arm,
Is lost indeed; since, what survives myself?
The brazen statue to o'erlook my grave,

Set on the promontory which I named.
And that — some supple courtier of my heir
Shall use its robed and sceptred arm, perhaps,
To fix the rope to, which best drags it down.
I go then: triumph thou, who dost not go!"

Nay, thou art worthy of hearing my whole mind.
Is this apparent, when thou turn'st to muse
Upon the scheme of earth and man in chief,
That admiration grows as knowledge grows?
That imperfection means perfection hid,
Reserved in part, to grace the after-time?
If, in the morning of philosophy,
Ere aught had been recorded, nay perceived,
Thou, with the light now in thee, couldst have looked
On all earth's tenantry, from worm to bird,
Ere man, her last, appeared upon the stage —
Thou wouldst have seen them perfect, and deduced
The perfectness of others yet unseen.
Conceding which, — had Zeus then questioned thee,
"Shall I go on a step, improve on this,
Do more for visible creatures than is done?"
Thou wouldst have answered, "Ay, by making each
Grow conscious in himself — by that alone.
All 's perfect else: the shell sucks fast the rock,
The fish strikes through the sea, the snake both swims
And slides, forth range the beasts, the birds take flight,
Till life's mechanics can no further go —
And all this joy in natural life is put
Like fire from off thy finger into each,
So exquisitely perfect is the same.
But 't is pure fire, and they mere matter are;
It has them, not they it: and so I choose
For man, thy last premeditated work
(If I might add a glory to the scheme),
That a third thing should stand apart from both,
A quality arise within his soul,
Which, intro-active, made to supervise
And feel the force it has, may view itself,
And so be happy." Man might live at first
The animal life: but is there nothing more?
In due time, let him critically learn
How he lives; and, the more he gets to know
Of his own life's adaptabilities,
The more joy-giving will his life become.
Thus man, who hath this quality, is best.

But thou, king, hadst more reasonably said:
"Let progress end at once, — man make no step
Beyond the natural man, the better beast,
Using his senses, not the sense of sense."
In man there 's failure, only since he left
The lower and inconscious forms of life.
We called it an advance, the rendering plain
Man's spirit might grow conscious of man's life,
And, by new lore so addèd to the old,
Take each step higher over the brute's head.
This grew the only life, the pleasure-house,
Watch-tower and treasure-fortress of the soul,
Which whole surrounding flats of natural life
Seemed only fit to yield subsistence to;
A tower that crowns a country. But alas,
The soul now climbs it just to perish there!
For thence we have discovered ('t is no dream —
We know this, which we had not else perceived)
That there 's a world of capability
For joy, spread round about us, meant for us,
Inviting us; and still the soul craves all,
And still the flesh replies, "Take no jot more
Than ere thou clombst the tower to look abroad!
Nay, so much less as that fatigue has brought
Deduction to it." We struggle, fain to enlarge
Our bounded physical recipiency,
Increase our power, supply fresh oil to life,
Repair the waste of age and sickness: no,
It skills not! life 's inadequate to joy,
As the soul sees joy, tempting life to take.
They praise a fountain in my garden here
Wherein a Naïad sends the water-bow
Thin from her tube; she smiles to see it rise.
What if I told her, it is just a thread
From that great river which the hills shut up,
And mock her with my leave to take the same?
The artificer has given her one small tube
Past power to widen or exchange — what boots
To know she might spout oceans if she could?
She cannot lift beyond her first thin thread:
And so a man can use but a man's joy
While he sees God's. Is it for Zeus to boast,
"See, man, how happy I live, and despair —
That I may be still happier — for thy use!"
If this were so, we could not thank our lord,
As hearts beat on to doing; 't is not so —

Malice it is not. Is it carelessness?
Still, no. If care — where is the sign? I ask,
And get no answer, and agree in sum,
O king, with thy profound discouragement,
Who seest the wider but to sigh the more.
Most progress is most failure: thou sayest well.

The last point now: — thou dost except a case —
Holding joy not impossible to one
With artist-gifts — to such a man as I
Who leave behind me living works indeed;
For, such a poem, such a painting lives.
What? dost thou verily trip upon a word,
Confound the accurate view of what joy is
(Caught somewhat clearer by my eyes than thine)
With feeling joy? confound the knowing how
And showing how to live (my faculty)
With actually living? — Otherwise
Where is the artist's vantage o'er the king?
Because in my great epos I display
How divers men young, strong, fair, wise, can act —
Is this as though I acted? if I paint,
Carve the young Phœbus, am I therefore young?
Methinks I'm older that I bowed myself
The many years of pain that taught me art!
Indeed, to know is something, and to prove
How all this beauty might be enjoyed, is more:
But, knowing nought, to enjoy is something too.
Yon rower, with the moulded muscles there,
Lowering the sail, is nearer it than I.
I can write love-odes: thy fair slave 's an ode.
I get to sing of love, when grown too gray
For being beloved: she turns to that young man,
The muscles all a-ripple on his back.
I know the joy of kingship: well, thou art king!

"But," sayest thou — (and I marvel, I repeat,
To find thee trip on such a mere word) "what
Thou writest, paintest, stays; that does not die:
Sappho survives, because we sing her songs,
And Æschylus, because we read his plays!"
Why, if they live still, let them come and take
Thy slave in my despite, drink from thy cup,
Speak in my place. Thou diest while I survive?
Say rather that my fate is deadlier still,
In this, that every day my sense of joy

Grows more acute, my soul (intensified
By power and insight) more enlarged, more keen;
While every day my hairs fall more and more,
My hand shakes, and the heavy years increase —
The horror quickening still from year to year,
The consummation coming past escape,
When I shall know most, and yet least enjoy —
When all my works wherein I prove my worth,
Being present still to mock me in men's mouths,
Alive still, in the praise of such as thou,
I, I the feeling, thinking, acting man,
The man who loved his life so over-much,
Sleep in my urn. It is so horrible,
I dare at times imagine to my need
Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,
Unlimited in capability
For joy, as this is in desire for joy,
— To seek which, the joy-hunger forces us:
That, stung by straitness of our life, made strait
On purpose to make prized the life at large —
Freed by the throbbing impulse we call death,
We burst there as the worm into the fly,
Who, while a worm still, wants his wings. But no!
Zeus has not yet revealed it; and alas,
He must have done so, were it possible!

Live long and happy, and in that thought die:
Glad for what was! Farewell. And for the rest,
I cannot tell thy messenger aright
Where to deliver what he bears of thine
To one called Paulus; we have heard his fame
Indeed, if Christus be not one with him —
I know not, nor am troubled much to know.
Thou canst not think a mere barbarian Jew,
As Paulus proves to be, one circumcised,
Hath access to a secret shut from us?
Thou wrongest our philosophy, O king,
In stooping to inquire of such an one,
As if his answer could impose at all!
He writeth, doth he? well, and he may write.
Oh, the Jew findeth scholars! certain slaves
Who touched on this same isle, preached him and Christ;
And (as I gathered from a bystander)
Their doctrine could be held by no sane man.

RUDEL TO THE LADY OF TRIPOLI.

I.

I KNOW a Mount, the gracious Sun perceives
First, when he visits, last, too, when he leaves
The world; and, vainly favored, it repays
The day-long glory of his steadfast gaze
By no change of its large calm front of snow.
And underneath the Mount, a Flower I know,
He cannot have perceived, that changes ever
At his approach; and, in the lost endeavor
To live his life, has parted, one by one,
With all a flower's true graces, for the grace
Of being but a foolish mimic sun,
With ray-like florets round a disk-like face.
Men nobly call by many a name the Mount
As over many a land of theirs its large
Calm front of snow like a triumphal targe
Is reared, and still with old names, fresh names vie,
Each to its proper praise and own account:
Men call the Flower, the Sunflower, sportively.

II.

Oh, Angel of the East, one, one gold look
Across the waters to this twilight nook,
— The far sad waters, Angel, to this nook!

III.

Dear Pilgrim, art thou for the East indeed?
Go! — saying ever as thou dost proceed,
That I, French Rudel, choose for my device
A sunflower outspread like a sacrifice
Before its idol. See! These inexpert
And hurried fingers could not fail to hurt
The woven picture; 't is a woman's skill
Indeed; but nothing baffled me, so, ill
Or well, the work is finished. Say, men feed
On songs I sing, and therefore bask the bees
On my flower's breast as on a platform broad:
But, as the flower's concern is not for these
But solely for the sun, so men applaud
In vain this Rudel, he not looking here
But to the East — the East! Go, say this, Pilgrim dear!

ONE WORD MORE.*

TO E. B. B.

London, September, 1855.

I.

There they are, my fifty men and women
Naming me the fifty poems finished!
Take them, Love, the book and me together:
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

II.

Rafael made a century of sonnets,
Made and wrote them in a certain volume
Dinted with the silver-pointed pencil
Else he only used to draw Madonnas:
These, the world might view — but one, the volume.
Who that one, you ask? Your heart instructs you.
Did she live and love it all her lifetime?
Did she drop, his lady of the sonnets,
Die, and let it drop beside her pillow
Where it lay in place of Rafael's glory,
Rafael's cheek so duteous and so loving —
Cheek, the world was wont to hail a painter's,
Rafael's cheek, her love had turned a poet's?

III.

You and I would rather read that volume,
(Taken to his beating bosom by it)
Lean and list the bosom-beats of Rafael,
Would we not? than wonder at Madonnas —
Her, San Sisto nam ., and Her, Foligno,
Her, that visits Florence in a vision,
Her, that 's left with lilies in the Louvre —
Seen by us and all the world in circle.

IV.

You and I will never read that volume.
Guido Reni, like his own eye's apple
Guarded long the treasure-book and loved it.
Guido Reni dying, all Bologna

* Originally appended to the collection of Poems called "Men and Women," the greater portion of which has now been, more correctly, distributed under the other titles of this edition.

Cried, and the world cried too, "Ours, the treasure!"
Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.

V.

Dante once prepared to paint an angel:
Whom to please? You whisper "Beatrice."
While he mused and traced it and retraced it,
(Peradventure with a pen corroded
Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,
When, his left-hand i' the hair o' the wicked,
Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,
Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,
Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle,
Let the wretch go festering through Florence) —
Dante, who loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
Dante standing, studying his angel, —
In there broke the folk of his Inferno.
Says he — "Certain people of importance"
(Such he gave his daily dreadful line to)
"Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet."
Says the poet — "Then I stopped my painting."

VI.

You and I would rather see that angel,
Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
Would we not? — than read a fresh Inferno.

VII.

You and I will never see that picture.
While he mused on love and Beatrice,
While he softened o'er his outlined angel,
In they broke, those "people of importance:"
We and Bice bear the loss forever.

VIII.

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's picture?
This: no artist lives and loves, that longs not
Once, and only once, and for one only,
(Ah, the prize!) to find his love a language
Fit and fair and simple and sufficient —
Using nature that 's an art to others,
Not, this one time, art that 's turned his nature.
Ay, of all the artists living, loving,
None but would forego his proper dowry, —
Does he paint? he fain would write a poem, —

Does he write? he fain would paint a picture,
Put to proof art alien to the artist's,
Once, and only once, and for one only,
So to be the man and leave the artist,
Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow.

IX.

Wherefore? Heaven's gift takes earth's abatement!
He who smites the rock and spreads the water,
Bidding drink and live a crowd beneath him,
Even he, the minute makes immortal,
Proves, perchance, but mortal in the minute,
Desecrates, belike, the deed in doing.
While he smites, how can he but remember,
So he smote before, in such a peril,
When they stood and mocked — "Shall smiting help us?
When they drank and sneered — "A stroke is easy!"
When they wiped their mouths and went their journey,
Throwing him for thanks — "But drought was pleasant."
Thus old memories mar the actual triumph;
Thus the doing savors of disrelish;
Thus achievement lacks a gracious somewhat;
O'er-importuned brows becloud the mandate,
Carelessness or consciousness — the gesture.
For he bears an ancient wrong about him,
Sees and knows again those phalanxed faces,
Hears, yet one time more, the 'customed prelude —
"How shouldst thou, of all men, smite, and save us?"
Guesses what is like to prove the sequel —
"Egypt's flesh-pots — nay, the drought was better."

X.

Oh, the crowd must have emphatic warrant!
Theirs, the Sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance,
Right-arm's rod-sweep, tongue's imperial fiat.
Never dares the man put off the prophet.

XI.

Did he love one face from out the thousands,
(Were she Jethro's daughter, white and wifely,
Were she but the Æthiopian bondslave,)
He would envy yon dumb patient camel,
Keeping a reserve of scanty water
Meant to save his own life in the desert;
Ready in the desert to deliver
(Kneeling down to let his breast be opened)
Hoard and life together for his mistress.

XII.

I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,
Make you music that should all-express me;
So it seems: I stand on my attainment.
This of verse alone, one life allows me;
Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
Other heights in other lives, God willing:
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love!

XIII.

Yet a semblance of resource avails us —
Shade so finely touched, love's sense must seize it.
Take these lines, look lovingly and nearly,
Lines I write the first time and the last time.
He who works in fresco, steals a hairbrush,
Curbs the liberal hand, subservient proudly,
Cramps his spirit, crowds its all in little,
Makes a strange art of an art familiar,
Fills his lady's missal-marge with flowerets.
He who blows through bronze, may breathe through silver,
Fitly serenade a slumbrous princess.
He who writes, may write for once as I do.

XIV.

Love, you saw me gather men and women,
Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,
Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth, — the speech, a poem.
Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,
Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving:
I am mine and yours — the rest be all men's,
Karshish, Cleon, Norbert, and the fifty.
Let me speak this once in my true person,
Not as Lippo, Roland, or Andrea,
Though the fruit of speech be just this sentence —
Pray you, look on these my men and women,
Take and keep my fifty poems finished;
Where my heart lies, let my brain lie also!
Poor the speech; be how I speak, for all things.

XV.

Not but that you know me! Lo, the moon's self!
Here in London, yonder late in Florence,
Still we find her face, the thrice-transfigured.

Curving on a sky imbrued with color,
Drifted over Fiesole by twilight,
Came she, our new crescent of a hair's-breadth.
Full she flared it, lamping Samminiato,
Rounder 'twixt the cypresses and rounder,
Perfect till the nightingales applauded.
Now, a piece of her old self, impoverished,
Hard to greet, she traverses the house-roofs,
Hurries with unhandsome thrift of silver,
Goes dispiritedly, glad to finish.

XVI.

What, there 's nothing in the moon noteworthy?
Nay: for if that moon could love a mortal,
Use, to charm him (so to fit a fancy),
All her magic ('t is the old sweet mythos),
She would turn a new side to her mortal,
Side unseen of herdsman, huntsman, steersman —
Blank to Zoroaster on his terrace,
Blind to Galileo on his turret,
Dumb to Homer, dumb to Keats — him, even!
Think, the wonder of the moonstruck mortal —
When she turns round, comes again in heaven,
Opens out anew for worse or better!
Proves she like some portent of an iceberg
Swimming full upon the ship it founders,
Hungry with huge teeth of splintered crystals?
Proves she as the paved work of a sapphire
Seen by Moses when he climbed the mountain?
Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu
Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest,
Stand upon the paved work of a sapphire.
Like the bodied heaven in his clearness
Shone the stone, the sapphire of that paved work,
When they ate and drank and saw God also!

XVII.

What were seen? None knows, none ever shall know.
Only this is sure — the sight were other,
Not the moon's same side, born late in Florence,
Dying now impoverished here in London.
God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her!

XVIII.

This I say of me, but think of you, Love!
This to you — yourself my moon of poets!
Ah, but that 's the world's side, there 's the wonder,
Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you!
There, in turn I stand with them and praise you —
Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
But the best is when I glide from out them,
Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
Come out on the other side, the novel
Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

XIX.

Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,
Wrote one song — and in my brain I sing it,
Drew one angel — borne, see, on my bosom!

IN A BALCONY

1853

CONSTANCE *and* NORBERT.

Nor. Now!
Con. Not now!
Nor. Give me them again, those hands
Put them upon my forehead, how it throbs!
Press them before my eyes, the fire comes through!
You cruellest, you dearest in the world,
Let me! The Queen must grant whate'er I ask —
How can I gain you and not ask the Queen?
There she stays waiting for me, here stand you;
Some time or other this was to be asked;
Now is the one time — what I ask, I gain:
Let me ask now, Love!
Con. Do, and ruin us!
Nor. Let it be now, Love! All my soul breaks forth.
How I do love you! Give my love its way!
A man can have but one life and one death,
One heaven, one hell. Let me fulfil my fate —
Grant me my heaven now! Let me know you mine,
Prove you mine, write my name upon your brow,
Hold you and have you, and then die away,
If God please, with completion in my soul!
Con. I am not yours then? How content this man!
I am not his — who change into himself,
Have passed into his heart and beat its beats,
Who give my hands to him, my eyes, my hair,
Give all that was of me away to him —
So well, that now, my spirit turned his own,
Takes part with him against the woman here,
Bids him not stumble at so mere a straw
As caring that the world be cognizant
How he loves her and how she worships him.
You have this woman, not as yet that world.
Go on, I bid, nor stop to care for me
By saving what I cease to care about,

The courtly name and pride of circumstance —
The name you 'll pick up and be cumbered with
Just for the poor parade's sake, nothing more;
Just that the world may slip from under you —
Just that the world may cry, "So much for him —
The man predestined to the heap of crowns:
There goes his chance of winning one, at least!"
Nor. The world!
Con. You love it! Love me quite as well,
And see if I shall pray for this in vain!
Why must you ponder what it knows or thinks?
Nor. You pray for — what, in vain?
Con. Oh my heart's heart,
How I do love you, Norbert! That is right:
But listen, or I take my hands away!
You say, "let it be now:" you would go now
And tell the Queen, perhaps six steps from us,
You love me — so you do, thank God!
Nor. Thank God!
Con. Yes, Norbert, — but you fain would tell your love,
And, what succeeds the telling, ask of her
My hand. Now take this rose and look at it,
Listening to me. You are the minister,
The Queen's first favorite, nor without a cause.
To-night completes your wonderful year's-work
(This palace-feast is held to celebrate)
Made memorable by her life's success,
The junction of two crowns, on her sole head,
Her house had only dreamed of anciently:
That this mere dream is grown a stable truth,
To-night's feast makes authentic. Whose the praise?
Whose genius, patience, energy, achieved
What turned the many heads and broke the hearts?
You are the fate, your minute 's in the heaven.
Next comes the Queen's turn. "Name your own reward!"
With leave to clench the past, chain the to-come,
Put out an arm and touch and take the sun
And fix it ever full-faced on your earth,
Possess yourself supremely of her life, —
You choose the single thing she will not grant;
Nay, very declaration of which choice
Will turn the scale and neutralize your work:
At best she will forgive you, if she can.
You think I 'll let you choose — her cousin's hand?
Nor. Wait. First, do you retain your old belief
The Queen is generous, — nay, is just?

Con. There, there!
So men make women love them, while they know
No more of women's hearts than . . . look you here,
You that are just and generous beside,
Make it your own case! For example now,
I'll say — I let you kiss me, hold my hands —
Why? do you know why? I'll instruct you, then —
The kiss, because you have a name at court;
This hand and this, that you may shut in each
A jewel, if you please to pick up such.
That's horrible? Apply it to the Queen —
Suppose I am the Queen to whom you speak.
"I was a nameless man; you needed me:
Why did I proffer you my aid? there stood
A certain pretty cousin at your side.
Why did I make such common cause with you?
Access to her had not been easy else.
You give my labor here abundant praise?
'Faith, labor, which she overlooked, grew play.
How shall your gratitude discharge itself?
Give me her hand!"
Nor. And still I urge the same.
Is the Queen just? just — generous or no!
Con. Yes, just. You love a rose; no harm in that:
But was it for the rose's sake or mine
You put it in your bosom? mine, you said —
Then, mine you still must say or else be false.
You told the Queen you served her for herself;
If so, to serve her was to serve yourself,
She thinks, for all your unbelieving face!
I know her. In the hall, six steps from us,
One sees the twenty pictures; there's a life
Better than life, and yet no life at all.
Conceive her born in such a magic dome,
Pictures all round her! why, she sees the world,
Can recognize its given things and facts,
The fight of giants or the feast of gods,
Sages in senate, beauties at the bath,
Chases and battles, the whole earth's display,
Landscape and sea-piece, down to flowers and fruit —
And who shall question that she knows them all,
In better semblance than the things outside?
Yet bring into the silent gallery
Some live thing to contrast in breath and blood,
Some lion, with the painted lion there —
You think she'll understand composedly?

— Say, "that 's his fellow in the hunting-piece
Yonder, I 've turned to praise a hundred times?"
Not so. Her knowledge of our actual earth,
Its hopes and fears, concerns and sympathies,
Must be too far, too mediate, too unreal.
The real exists for us outside, not her:
How should it, with that life in these four walls,
That father and that mother, first to last
No father and no mother — friends, a heap,
Lovers, no lack — a husband in due time,
And every one of them alike a lie!
Things painted by a Rubens out of nought
Into what kindness, friendship, love should be;
All better, all more grandiose than the life,
Only no life; mere cloth and surface-paint,
You feel, while you admire. How should she feel?
Yet now that she has stood thus fifty years
The sole spectator in that gallery,
You think to bring this warm real struggling love
In to her of a sudden, and suppose
She 'll keep her state untroubled? Here 's the truth —
She 'll apprehend truth's value at a glance,
Prefer it to the pictured loyalty?
You only have to say, "So men are made,
For this they act; the thing has many names,
But this the right one: and now, Queen, be just!"
Your life slips back; you lose her at the word:
You do not even for amends gain me.
He will not understand! oh, Norbert, Norbert,
Do you not understand?
Nor. The Queen 's the Queen,
I am myself — no picture, but alive
In every nerve and every muscle, here
At the palace-window o'er the people's street,
As she in the gallery where the pictures glow:
The good of life is precious to us both.
She cannot love; what do I want with rule?
When first I saw your face a year ago
I knew my life's good, my soul heard one voice —
"The woman yonder, there 's no use of life
But just to obtain her! heap earth's woes in one
And bear them — make a pile of all earth's joys
And spurn them, as they help or help not this;
Only, obtain her!" How was it to be?
I found you were the cousin of the Queen;
I must then serve the Queen to get to you.

No other way. Suppose there had been one,
And I, by saying prayers to some white star
With promise of my body and my soul,
Might gain you,—should I pray the star or no?
Instead, there was the Queen to serve! I served,
Helped, did what other servants failed to do.
Neither she sought nor I declared my end.
Her good is hers, my recompense be mine,—
I therefore name you as that recompense.
She dreamed that such a thing could never be?
Let her wake now. She thinks there was more cause
In love of power, high fame, pure loyalty?
Perhaps she fancies men wear out their lives
Chasing such shades. Then, I 've a fancy too;
I worked because I want you with my soul:
I therefore ask your hand. Let it be now!
Con. Had I not loved you from the very first,
Were I not yours, could we not steal out thus
So wickedly, so wildly, and so well,
You might become impatient. What 's conceived
Of us without here, by the folk within?
Where are you now? immersed in cares of state—
Where am I now? intent on festal robes—
We two, embracing under death's spread hand!
What was this thought for, what that scruple of yours
Which broke the council up?—to bring about
One minute's meeting in the corridor!
And then the sudden sleights, strange secrecies,
Complots inscrutable, deep telegraphs,
Long-planned chance-meetings, hazards of a look,
"Does she know? does she not know? saved or lost?"
A year of this compression's ecstasy
All goes for nothing! you would give this up
For the old way, the open way, the world's,
His way who beats, and his who sells his wife!
What tempts you?—their notorious happiness
Makes you ashamed of ours? The best you 'll gain
Will be—the Queen grants all that you require,
Concedes the cousin, rids herself of you
And me at once, and gives us ample leave
To live like our five hundred happy friends.
The world will show us with officious hand
Our chamber-entry, and stand sentinel
Where we so oft have stolen across its traps!
Get the world's warrant, ring the falcons' feet,
And make it duty to be bold and swift,

Which long ago was nature. Have it so!
We never hawked by rights till flung from fist?
Oh, the man's thought! no woman 's such a fool.

Nor. Yes, the man's thought and my thought, which is more —
One made to love you, let the world take note!
Have I done worthy work? be love's the praise,
Though hampered by restrictions, barred against
By set forms, blinded by forced secrecies!
Set free my love, and see what love can do
Shown in my life — what work will spring from that!
The world is used to have its business done
On other grounds, find great effects produced
For power's sake, fame's sake, motives in men's mouth.
So, good: but let my low ground shame their high!
Truth is the strong thing. Let man's life be true!
And love 's the truth of mine. Time prove the rest!
I choose to wear you stamped all over me,
Your name upon my forehead and my breast,
You, from the sword's blade to the ribbon's edge,
That men may see, all over, you in me —
That pale loves may die out of their pretence
In face of mine, shames thrown on love fall off.
Permit this, Constance! Love has been so long
Subdued in me, eating me through and through,
That now 't is all of me and must have way.
Think of my work, that chaos of intrigues,
Those hopes and fears, surprises and delays,
That long endeavor, earnest, patient, slow,
Trembling at last to its assured result:
Then think of this revulsion! I resume
Life after death, (it is no less than life,
After such long unlovely laboring days,)
And liberate to beauty life's great need
O' the beautiful, which, while it prompted work,
Suppressed itself erewhile. This eve 's the time,
This eve intense with yon first trembling star
We seem to pant and reach; scarce aught between
The earth that rises and the heaven that bends;
All nature self-abandoned, every tree
Flung as it will, pursuing its own thoughts
And fixed so, every flower and every weed,
No pride, no shame, no victory, no defeat;
All under God, each measured by itself.
These statues round us stand abrupt, distinct,
The strong in strength, the weak in weakness fixed,

The Muse forever wedded to her lyre,
Nymph to her fawn, and Silence to her rose:
See God's approval on his universe!
Let us do so — aspire to live as these
In harmony with truth, ourselves being true!
Take the first way, and let the second come!
My first is to possess myself of you;
The music sets the march-step — forward, then!
And there 's the Queen, I go to claim you of,
The world to witness, wonder and applaud.
Our flower of life breaks open. No delay!

Con. And so shall we be ruined, both of us.
Norbert, I know her to the skin and bone:
You do not know her, were not born to it,
To feel what she can see or cannot see.
Love, she is generous, — ay, despite your smile,
Generous as you are: for, in that thin frame
Pain-twisted, punctured through and through with cares,
There lived a lavish soul until it starved,
Debarred of healthy food. Look to the soul —
Pity that, stoop to that, ere you begin
(The true man's-way) on justice and your rights,
Exactions and acquittance of the past!
Begin so — see what justice she will deal!
We women hate a debt as men a gift.
Suppose her some poor keeper of a school
Whose business is to sit through summer months
And dole out children leave to go and play,
Herself superior to such lightness — she
In the arm-chair's state and pædagogic pomp —
To the life, the laughter, sun and youth outside:
We wonder such a face looks black on us?
I do not bid you wake her tenderness,
(That were vain truly — none is left to wake,)
But, let her think her justice is engaged
To take the shape of tenderness, and mark
If she 'll not coldly pay its warmest debt!
Does she love me, I ask you? not a whit:
Yet, thinking that her justice was engaged
To help a kinswoman, she took me up —
Did more on that bare ground than other loves
Would do on greater argument. For me,
I have no equivalent of such cold kind
To pay her with, but love alone to give
If I give anything. I give her love:
I feel I ought to help her, and I will.

So, for her sake, as yours, I tell you twice
That women hate a debt as men a gift.
If I were you, I could obtain this grace —
Could lay the whole I did to love's account,
Nor yet be very false as courtiers go —
Declaring my success was recompense;
It would be so, in fact: what were it else?
And then, once loose her generosity, —
Oh, how I see it! then, were I but you
To turn it, let it seem to move itself,
And make it offer what I really take,
Accepting just, in the poor cousin's hand,
Her value as the next thing to the Queen's —
Since none love Queens directly, none dare that,
And a thing's shadow or a name's mere echo
Suffices those who miss the name and thing!
You pick up just a ribbon she has worn,
To keep in proof how near her breath you came.
Say, I'm so near I seem a piece of her —
Ask for me that way — (oh, you understand,)
You'd find the same gift yielded with a grace,
Which, if you make the least show to extort . . .
— You'll see! and when you have ruined both of us,
Dissertate on the Queen's ingratitude!

Nor. Then, if I turn it that way, you consent?
'T is not my way; I have more hope in truth:
Still, if you won't have truth — why, this indeed,
Were scarcely false, as I'd express the sense.
Will you remain here?

Con. O best heart of mine,
How I have loved you! then, you take my way?
Are mine as you have been her minister,
Work out my thought, give it effect for me,
Paint plain my poor conceit and make it serve?
I owe that withered woman everything —
Life, fortune, you, remember! Take my part —
Help me to pay her! Stand upon your rights?
You, with my rose, my hands, my heart on you?
Your rights are mine — you have no rights but mine.

Nor. Remain here. How you know me!

Con. Ah, but still ——

[*He breaks from her; she remains. Dance-music from within.*

Enter the QUEEN.

Queen. Constance? She is here as he said. Speak quick!
Is it so? Is it true or false? One word!

Con. True.

Queen. Mercifullest Mother, thanks to thee!

Con. Madam?

Queen. I love you, Constance, from my soul.
Now say once more, with any words you will,
'T is true, all true, as true as that I speak.

Con. Why should you doubt it?

Queen. Ah, why doubt? why doubt?
Dear, make me see it! Do you see it so?
None see themselves; another sees them best.
You say "why doubt it?" — you see him and me.
It is because the Mother has such grace
That if we had but faith — wherein we fail —
Whate'er we yearn for would be granted us;
Yet still we let our whims prescribe despair,
Our fancies thwart and cramp our will and power,
And while accepting life, abjure its use.
Constance, I had abjured the hope of love
And being loved, as truly as yon palm
The hope of seeing Egypt from that plot.

Con. Heaven!

Queen. But it was so, Constance, it was so!
Men say — or do men say it? fancies say —
"Stop here, your life is set, you are grown old.
Too late — no love for you, too late for love —
Leave love to girls. Be queen: let Constance love!"
One takes the hint — half meets it like a child,
Ashamed at any feelings that oppose.
"Oh love, true, never think of love again!
I am a queen: I rule, not love, forsooth."
So it goes on; so a face grows like this,
Hair like this hair, poor arms as lean as these,
Till, — nay, it does not end so, I thank God!

Con. I cannot understand —

Queen. The happier you!
Constance, I know not how it is with men:
For women (I am a woman now like you)
There is no good of life but love — but love!
What else looks good, is some shade flung from love;
Love gilds it, gives it worth. Be warned by me,
Never you cheat yourself one instant! Love,
Give love, ask only love, and leave the rest!
O Constance, how I love you!

Con. I love you.
Queen. I do believe that all is come through you.
I took you to my heart to keep it warm
When the last chance of love seemed dead in me;
I thought your fresh youth warmed my withered heart.
Oh, I am very old now, am I not?
Not so! it is true and it shall be true!
Con. Tell it me: let me judge if true or false.
Queen. Ah, but I fear you! you will look at me
And say, "she's old, she's grown unlovely quite
Who ne'er was beauteous: men want beauty still."
Well, so I feared — the curse! so I felt sure!
Con. Be calm. And now you feel not sure, you say?
Queen. Constance, he came, — the coming was not strange —
Do not I stand and see men come and go?
I turned a half-look from my pedestal
Where I grow marble — "one young man the more!
He will love some one; that is nought to me:
What would he with my marble stateliness?"
Yet this seemed somewhat worse than heretofore;
The man more gracious, youthful, like a god,
And I still older, with less flesh to change —
We two those dear extremes that long to touch.
It seemed still harder when he first began
To labor at those state-affairs, absorbed
The old way for the old end — interest.
Oh, to live with a thousand beating hearts
Around you, swift eyes, serviceable hands,
Professing they've no care but for your cause,
Thought but to help you, love but for yourself, —
And you the marble statue all the time
They praise and point at as preferred to life,
Yet leave for the first breathing woman's smile,
First dancer's, gypsy's, or street baladine's!
Why, how I have ground my teeth to hear men's speech
Stifled for fear it should alarm my ear,
Their gait subdued lest step should startle me,
Their eyes declined, such queendom to respect,
Their hands alert, such treasure to preserve,
While not a man of them broke rank and spoke,
Wrote me a vulgar letter all of love,
Or caught my hand and pressed it like a hand!
There have been moments, if the sentinel
Lowering his halbert to salute the queen,
Had flung it brutally and clasped my knees,
I would have stooped and kissed him with my soul.

Con. Who could have comprehended?
Queen. Ay, who — who?
Why, no one, Constance, but this one who did.
Not they, not you, not I. Even now perhaps
It comes too late — would you but tell the truth.
Con. I wait to tell it.
Queen. Well, you see, he came,
Outfaced the others, did a work this year
Exceeds in value all was ever done,
You know — it is not I who say it — all
Say it. And so (a second pang and worse)
I grew aware not only of what he did,
But why so wondrously. Oh, never work
Like his was done for work's ignoble sake —
Souls need a finer aim to light and lure!
I felt, I saw, he loved — loved somebody.
And Constance, my dear Constance, do you know,
I did believe this while 't was you he loved.
Con. Me, madam?
Queen. It did seem to me, your face
Met him where'er he looked: and whom but you
Was such a man to love? It seemed to me,
You saw he loved you, and approved his love,
And both of you were in intelligence.
You could not loiter in that garden, step
Into this balcony, but I straight was stung
And forced to understand. It seemed so true,
So right, so beautiful, so like you both,
That all this work should have been done by him
Not for the vulgar hope of recompense,
But that at last — suppose, some night like this —
Borne on to claim his due reward of me,
He might say, "Give her hand and pay me so."
And I (O Constance, you shall love me now!)
I thought, surmounting all the bitterness,
— "And he shall have it. I will make her blest,
My flower of youth, my woman's self that was,
My happiest woman's self that might have been!
These two shall have their joy and leave me here."
Yes — yes!
Con. Thanks!
Queen. And the word was on my lips
When he burst in upon me. I looked to hear
A mere calm statement of his just desire
For payment of his labor. When — O heaven,
How can I tell you? lightning on my eyes

And thunder in my ears proved that first word
Which told 't was love of me, of me, did all —
He loved me — from the first step to the last,
Loved me!

Con. You hardly saw, scarce heard him speak
Of love: what if you should mistake?

Queen. No, no —
No mistake! Ha, there shall be no mistake!
He had not dared to hint the love he felt —
You were my reflex — (how I understood!)
He said you were the ribbon I had worn,
He kissed my hand, he looked into my eyes,
And love, love came at end of every phrase.
Love is begun; this much is come to pass:
The rest is easy. Constance, I am yours!
I will learn, I will place my life on you,
Teach me but how to keep what I have won!
Am I so old? This hair was early gray;
But joy ere now has brought hair brown again,
And joy will bring the cheek's red back, I feel.
I could sing once too; that was in my youth.
Still, when men paint me, they declare me . . . yes,
Beautiful — for the last French painter did!
I know they flatter somewhat; you are frank —
I trust you. How I loved you from the first!
Some queens would hardly seek a cousin out
And set her by their side to take the eye:
I must have felt that good would come from you.
I am not generous — like him — like you!
But he is not your lover after all:
It was not you he looked at. Saw you him?
You have not been mistaking words or looks?
He said you were the reflex of myself.
And yet he is not such a paragon
To you, to younger women who may choose
Among a thousand Norberts. Speak the truth!
You know you never named his name to me:
You know, I cannot give him up — ah God,
Not up now, even to you!

Con. Then calm yourself.

Queen. See, I am old — look here, you happy girl!
I will not play the fool, deceive — ah, whom?
'T is all gone: put your cheek beside my cheek
And what a contrast does the moon behold!
But then I set my life upon one chance,
The last chance and the best — am *I* not left,

My soul, myself? All women love great men
If young or old; it is in all the tales:
Young beauties love old poets who can love —
Why should not he, the poems in my soul,
The passionate faith, the pride of sacrifice,
Life-long, death-long? I throw them at his feet.
Who cares to see the fountain's very shape,
Whether it be a Triton's or a Nymph's
That pours the foam, makes rainbows all around?
You could not praise indeed the empty conch;
But I'll pour floods of love and hide myself.
How I will love him! Cannot men love love?
Who was a queen and loved a poet once
Humpbacked, a dwarf? ah, women can do that!
Well, but men too; at least, they tell you so.
They love so many women in their youth,
And even in age they all love whom they please;
And yet the best of them confide to friends
That 't is not beauty makes the lasting love —
They spend a day with such and tire the next:
They like soul, — well then, they like phantasy,
Novelty even. Let us confess the truth,
Horrible though it be, that prejudice,
Prescription . . . curses! they will love a queen.
They will, they do: and will not, does not — he?

Con. How can he? You are wedded: 't is a name
We know, but still a bond. Your rank remains,
His rank remains. How can he, nobly souled
As you believe and I incline to think,
Aspire to be your favorite, shame and all?

Queen. Hear her! There, there now — could she love like me?
What did I say of smooth-cheeked youth and grace?
See all it does or could do! so youth loves!
Oh, tell him, Constance, you could never do
What I will — you, it was not born in! I
Will drive these difficulties far and fast
As yonder mists curdling before the moon.
I'll use my light too, gloriously retrieve
My youth from its enforced calamity,
Dissolve that hateful marriage, and be his,
His own in the eyes alike of God and man.

Con. You will do — dare do . . . pause on what you say!

Queen. Hear her! I thank you, sweet, for that surprise.
You have the fair face: for the soul, see mine!
I have the strong soul: let me teach you, here.

I think I have borne enough and long enough,
And patiently enough, the world remarks,
To have my own way now, unblamed by all.
It does so happen (I rejoice for it)
This most unhoped-for issue cuts the knot.
There 's not a better way of settling claims
Than this; God sends the accident express:
And were it for my subjects' good, no more,
'T were best thus ordered. I am thankful now,
Mute, passive, acquiescent. I receive,
And bless God simply, or should almost fear
To walk so smoothly to my ends at last.
Why, how I baffle obstacles, spurn fate!
How strong I am! Could Norbert see me now!

Con. Let me consider. It is all too strange.

Queen. You, Constance, learn of me; do you, like me!
You are young, beautiful: my own, best girl,
You will have many lovers, and love one —
Light hair, not hair like Norbert's, to suit yours,
Taller than he is, since yourself are tall.
Love him, like me! Give all away to him;
Think never of yourself; throw by your pride,
Hope, fear, — your own good as you saw it once,
And love him simply for his very self.
Remember, I (and what am I to you?)
Would give up all for one, leave throne, lose life,
Do all but just unlove him! He loves me.

Con. He shall.

Queen. You, step inside my inmost heart!
Give me your own heart: let us have one heart!
I 'll come to you for counsel; "this he says,
This he does; what should this amount to, pray?
Beseech you, change it into current coin!
Is that worth kisses? Shall I please him there?"
And then we 'll speak in turn of you — what else?
Your love, according to your beauty's worth,
For you shall have some noble love, all gold:
Whom choose you? we will get him at your choice.
— Constance, I leave you. Just a minute since,
I felt as I must die or be alone
Breathing my soul into an ear like yours:
Now, I would face the world with my new life,
Wear my new crown. I 'll walk around the rooms,
And then come back and tell you how it feels.
How soon a smile of God can change the world!
How we are made for happiness — how work

Grows play, adversity a winning fight!
True, I have lost so many years: what then?
Many remain: God has been very good.
You, stay here! 'T is as different from dreams,
From the mind's cold calm estimate of bliss,
As these stone statues from the flesh and blood.
The comfort thou hast caused mankind, God's moon!
[*She goes out, leaving* CONSTANCE. *Dance-music from within.*

NORBERT *enters.*

Nor. Well? we have but one minute and one word!
Con. I am yours, Norbert!
Nor. Yes, mine.
Con. Not till now!
You were mine. Now I give myself to you.
Nor. Constance?
Con. Your own! I know the thriftier way
Of giving — haply, 't is the wiser way.
Meaning to give a treasure, I might dole
Coin after coin out (each, as that were all,
With a new largess still at each despair)
And force you keep in sight the deed, preserve
Exhaustless till the end my part and yours,
My giving and your taking; both our joys
Dying together. Is it the wiser way?
I choose the simpler; I give all at once.
Know what you have to trust to, trade upon!
Use it, abuse it, — anything but think
Hereafter, "Had I known she loved me so,
And what my means, I might have thriven with it."
This is your means. I give you all myself.
Nor. I take you and thank God.
Con. Look on through years!
We cannot kiss, a second day like this;
Else were this earth no earth.
Nor. With this day's heat
We shall go on through years of cold.
Con. So, best!
— I try to see those years — I think I see.
You walk quick and new warmth comes; you look back
And lay all to the first glow — not sit down
Forever brooding on a day like this
While seeing embers whiten and love die.
Yes, love lives best in its effect; and mine,
Full in its own life, yearns to live in yours.
Nor. Just so. I take and know you all at once.
Your soul is disengaged so easily,

Your face is there, I know you; give me time,
Let me be proud and think you shall know me.
My soul is slower: in a life I roll
The minute out whereto you condense yours —
The whole slow circle round you I must move,
To be just you. I look to a long life
To decompose this minute, prove its worth.
'T is the sparks' long succession one by one
Shall show you, in the end, what fire was crammed
In that mere stone you struck: how could you know,
If it lay ever unproved in your sight,
As now my heart lies? your own warmth would hide
Its coldness, were it cold.

Con. But how prove, how?

Nor. Prove in my life, you ask?

Con. Quick, Norbert — how!

Nor. That 's easy told. I count life just a stuff
To try the soul's strength on, educe the man.
Who keeps one end in view makes all things serve.
As with the body — he who hurls a lance
Or heaps up stone on stone, shows strength alike:
So must I seize and task all means to prove
And show this soul of mine, you crown as yours,
And justify us both.

Con. Could you write books,
Paint pictures! One sits down in poverty
And writes or paints, with pity for the rich.

Nor. And loves one's painting and one's writing, then,
And not one's mistress! All is best, believe,
And we best as no other than we are.
We live, and they experiment on life —
Those poets, painters, all who stand aloof
To overlook the farther. Let us be
The thing they look at! I might take your face
And write of it and paint it — to what end?
For whom? what pale dictatress in the air
Feeds, smiling sadly, her fine ghost-like form
With earth's real blood and breath, the beauteous life
She makes despised forever? You are mine,
Made for me, not for others in the world,
Nor yet for that which I should call my art,
The cold calm power to see how fair you look.
I come to you; I leave you not, to write
Or paint. You are, I am: let Rubens there
Paint us!

Con. So, best!

Nor. I understand your soul.
You live, and rightly sympathize with life,
With action, power, success. This way is straight;
And time were short beside, to let me change
The craft my childhood learnt: my craft shall serve.
Men set me here to subjugate, enclose,
Manure their barren lives, and force thence fruit
First for themselves, and afterward for me
In the due tithe; the task of some one soul,
Through ways of work appointed by the world.
I am not bid create — men see no star
Transfiguring my brow to warrant that —
But find and bind and bring to bear their wills.
So I began: to-night sees how I end.
What if it see, too, power's first outbreak here
Amid the warmth, surprise and sympathy,
And instincts of the heart that teach the head?
What if the people have discerned at length
The dawn of the next nature, novel brain
Whose will they venture in the place of theirs,
Whose work, they trust, shall find them as novel ways
To untried heights which yet he only sees?
I felt it when you kissed me. See this Queen,
This people — in our phrase, this mass of men —
See how the mass lies passive to my hand
Now that my hand is plastic, with you by
To make the muscles iron! Oh, an end
Shall crown this issue as this crowns the first!
My will be on this people! then, the strain,
The grappling of the potter with his clay,
The long uncertain struggle, — the success
And consummation of the spirit-work,
Some vase shaped to the curl of the god's lip,
While rounded fair for human sense to see
The Graces in a dance men recognize
With turbulent applause and laughs of heart!
So triumph ever shall renew itself;
Ever shall end in efforts higher yet,
Ever begin . . .
Con. I ever helping?
Nor. Thus!
[*As he embraces her, the* Queen *enters*
Con. Hist, madam! So have I performed my part.
You see your gratitude's true decency,
Norbert? A little slow in seeing it!
Begin, to end the sooner! What's a kiss?

Nor. Constance?

Con. Why, must I teach it you again?
You want a witness to your dulness, sir?
What was I saying these ten minutes long?
Then I repeat — when some young handsome man
Like you has acted out a part like yours,
Is pleased to fall in love with one beyond,
So very far beyond him, as he says —
So hopelessly in love that but to speak
Would prove him mad, — he thinks judiciously,
And makes some insignificant good soul,
Like me, his friend, adviser, confidant,
And very stalking-horse to cover him
In following after what he dares not face —
When his end 's gained — (sir, do you understand?)
When she, he dares not face, has loved him first,
— May I not say so, madam? — tops his hope,
And overpasses so his wildest dream,
With glad consent of all, and most of her
The confidant who brought the same about —
Why, in the moment when such joy explodes,
I do hold that the merest gentleman
Will not start rudely from the stalking-horse,
Dismiss it with a "There, enough of you!"
Forget it, show his back unmannerly;
But like a liberal heart will rather turn
And say, "A tingling time of hope was ours;
Betwixt the fears and falterings, we two lived
A chanceful time in waiting for the prize:
The confidant, the Constance, served not ill.
And though I shall forget her in due time,
Her use being answered now, as reason bids,
Nay as herself bids from her heart of hearts, —
Still, she has rights, the first thanks go to her,
The first good praise goes to the prosperous tool,
And the first — which is the last — rewarding kiss."

Nor. Constance, it is a dream — ah, see, you smile!

Con. So, now his part being properly performed,
Madam, I turn to you and finish mine
As duly; I do justice in my turn.
Yes, madam, he has loved you — long and well;
He could not hope to tell you so — 't was I
Who served to prove your soul accessible,
I led his thoughts on, drew them to their place
When they had wandered else into despair,
And kept love constant toward its natural aim.

Enough, my part is played; you stoop half-way
And meet us royally and spare our fears:
'T is like yourself. He thanks you, so do I.
Take him — with my full heart! my work is praised
By what comes of it. Be you happy, both!
Yourself — the only one on earth who can —
Do all for him, much more than a mere heart
Which though warm is not useful in its warmth
As the silk vesture of a queen! fold that
Around him gently, tenderly. For him —
For him, — he knows his own part!

Nor. Have you done?
I take the jest at last. Should I speak now?
Was yours the wager, Constance, foolish child,
Or did you but accept it? Well — at least
You lose by it.

Con. Nay, madam, 't is your turn!
Restrain him still from speech a little more,
And make him happier as more confident!
Pity him, madam, he is timid yet!
Mark, Norbert! Do not shrink now! Here I yield
My whole right in you to the Queen, observe!
With her go put in practice the great schemes
You teem with, follow the career else closed —
Be all you cannot be except by her!
Behold her! — Madam, say for pity's sake
Anything — frankly say you love him! Else
He'll not believe it: there 's more earnest in
His fear than you conceive: I know the man!

Nor. I know the woman somewhat, and confess
I thought she had jested better: she begins
To overcharge her part. I gravely wait
Your pleasure, madam: where is my reward?

Queen. Norbert, this wild girl (whom I recognize
Scarce more than you do, in her fancy-fit,
Eccentric speech and variable mirth,
Not very wise perhaps and somewhat bold,
Yet suitable, the whole night's work being strange)
— May still be right: I may do well to speak
And make authentic what appears a dream
To even myself. For, what she says is true:
Yes, Norbert — what you spoke just now of love,
Devotion, stirred no novel sense in me,
But justified a warmth felt long before.
Yes, from the first — I loved you, I shall say:
Strange! but I do grow stronger, now 't is said.

Your courage helps mine: you did well to speak
To-night, the night that crowns your twelvemonths' toil:
But still I had not waited to discern
Your heart so long, believe me! From the first
The source of so much zeal was almost plain,
In absence even of your own words just now
Which hazarded the truth. 'T is very strange,
But takes a happy ending — in your love
Which mine meets: be it so! as you chose me,
So I choose you.

Nor. And worthily you choose.
I will not be unworthy your esteem,
No, madam. I do love you; I will meet
Your nature, now I know it. This was well.
I see, — you dare and you are justified:
But none had ventured such experiment,
Less versed than you in nobleness of heart,
Less confident of finding such in me.
I joy that thus you test me ere you grant
The dearest richest beauteousest and best
Of women to my arms: 't is like yourself.
So — back again into my part's set words —
Devotion to the uttermost is yours,
But no, you cannot, madam, even you,
Create in me the love our Constance does.
Or — something truer to the tragic phrase —
Not yon magnolia-bell superb with scent
Invites a certain insect — that 's myself —
But the small eye-flower nearer to the ground.
I take this lady.

Con. Stay — not hers, the trap —
Stay, Norbert — that mistake were worst of all!
He is too cunning, madam! It was I,
I, Norbert, who . . .

Nor. You, was it, Constance? Then,
But for the grace of this divinest hour
Which gives me you, I might not pardon here!
I am the Queen's; she only knows my brain:
She may experiment upon my heart
And I instruct her too by the result.
But you, Sweet, you who know me, who so long
Have told my heartbeats over, held my life
In those white hands of yours, — it is not well!

Con. Tush! I have said it, did I not say it all?
The life, for her — the heartbeats, for her sake!

Nor. Enough! my cheek grows red, I think. Your test

There 's not the meanest woman in the world,
Not she I least could love in all the world,
Whom, did she love me, had love proved itself,
I dare insult as you insult me now.
Constance, I could say, if it must be said,
"Take back the soul you offer, I keep mine!"
But — "Take the soul still quivering on your hand,
The soul so offered, which I cannot use,
And, please you, give it to some playful friend,
For — what 's the trifle he requites me with?"
I, tempt a woman, to amuse a man,
That two may mock her heart if it succumb?
No: fearing God and standing 'neath his heaven,
I would not dare insult a woman so,
Were she the meanest woman in the world,
And he, I cared to please, ten emperors!

Con. Norbert!

Nor. I love once as I live but once.
What case is this to think or talk about?
I love you. Would it mend the case at all
If such a step as this killed love in me?
Your part were done: account to God for it!
But mine — could murdered love get up again,
And kneel to whom you please to designate,
And make you mirth? It is too horrible.
You did not know this, Constance? now you know
That body and soul have each one life, but one:
And here 's my love, here, living, at your feet.

Con. See the Queen! Norbert — this one more last word —
If thus you have taken jest for earnest — thus
Loved me in earnest . . .

Nor. Ah, no jest holds here!
Where is the laughter in which jests break up,
And what this horror that grows palpable?
Madam — why grasp you thus the balcony?
Have I done ill? Have I not spoken truth?
How could I other? Was it not your test,
To try me, what my love for Constance meant?
Madam, your royal soul itself approves,
The first, that I should choose thus! so one takes
A beggar, — asks him, what would buy his child?
And then approves the expected laugh of scorn
Returned as something noble from the rags.
Speak, Constance, I 'm the beggar! Ha, what 's this?
You two glare each at each like panthers now.
Constance, the world fades; only you stand there!

You did not, in to-night's wild whirl of things,
Sell me — your soul of souls, for any price?
No — no — 't is easy to believe in you!
Was it your love's mad trial to o'ertop
Mine by this vain self-sacrifice? well, still —
Though I might curse, I love you. I am love
And cannot change: love's self is at your feet!

[*The* QUEEN *goes out.*

Con. Feel my heart; let it die against your own!
Nor. Against my own. Explain not; let this be!
This is life's height.
Con. Yours, yours, yours!
Nor. You and I —
Why care by what meanders we are here
I' the centre of the labyrinth? Men have died
Trying to find this place, which we have found.
Con. Found, found!
Nor. Sweet, never fear what she can do!
We are past harm now.
Con. On the breast of God.
I thought of men — as if you were a man.
Tempting him with a crown!
Nor. This must end here:
It is too perfect.
Con. There 's the music stopped.
What measured heavy tread? It is one blaze
About me and within me.
Nor. Oh, some death
Will run its sudden finger round this spark
And sever us from the rest!
Con. And so do well.
Now the doors open.
Nor. 'T is the guard comes.
Con. Kiss!

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

1864.

JAMES LEE'S WIFE.

I.

JAMES LEE'S WIFE SPEAKS AT THE WINDOW.

I.

Ah, Love, but a day
  And the world has changed!
The sun 's away,
  And the bird estranged;
The wind has dropped,
  And the sky 's deranged:
Summer has stopped.

II.

Look in my eyes!
  Wilt thou change too?
Should I fear surprise?
  Shall I find aught new
In the old and dear,
  In the good and true,
With the changing year?

III.

Thou art a man,
  But I am thy love.
For the lake, its swan;
  For the dell, its dove;
And for thee — (oh, haste!)
  Me, to bend above,
Me, to hold embraced.

II.

BY THE FIRESIDE.

I.

Is all our fire of shipwreck wood,
Oak and pine?
Oh, for the ills half-understood,
The dim dead woe
Long ago
Befallen this bitter coast of France!
Well, poor sailors took their chance;
I take mine.

II.

A ruddy shaft our fire must shoot
O'er the sea:
Do sailors eye the casement — mute
Drenched and stark,
From their bark —
And envy, gnash their teeth for hate
O' the warm safe house and happy freight
— Thee and me?

III.

God help you, sailors, at your need!
Spare the curse!
For some ships, safe in port indeed,
Rot and rust,
Run to dust,
All through worms i' the wood, which crept,
Gnawed our hearts out while we slept:
That is worse.

IV.

Who lived here before us two?
Old-world pairs.
Did a woman ever — would I knew! —
Watch the man
With whom began
Love's voyage full-sail, — (now, gnash your teeth!)
When planks start, open hell beneath
Unawares?

III.

IN THE DOORWAY.

I.

THE swallow has set her six young on the rail,
  And looks sea-ward:
The water 's in stripes like a snake, olive-pale
  To the leeward, —
On the weather-side, black, spotted white with the wind.
"Good fortune departs, and disaster 's behind," —
Hark, the wind with its wants and its infinite wail!

II.

Our fig-tree, that leaned for the saltness, has furled
  Her five fingers,
Each leaf like a hand opened wide to the world
  Where there lingers
No glint of the gold, Summer sent for her sake:
How the vines writhe in rows, each impaled on its stake!
My heart shrivels up and my spirit shrinks curled.

III.

Yet here are we two; we have love, house enough,
  With the field there,
This house of four rooms, that field red and rough,
  Though it yield there,
For the rabbit that robs, scarce a blade or a bent;
If a magpie alight now, it seems an event;
And they both will be gone at November's rebuff.

IV.

But why must cold spread? but wherefore bring change
  To the spirit,
God meant should mate his with an infinite range,
  And inherit
His power to put life in the darkness and cold?
Oh, live and love worthily, bear and be bold!
Whom Summer made friends of, let Winter estrange!

IV.

ALONG THE BEACH.

I.

I WILL be quiet and talk with you,
 And reason why you are wrong.
You wanted my love — is that much true?
And so I did love, so I do:
 What has come of it all along?

II.

I took you — how could I otherwise?
 For a world to me, and more;
For all, love greatens and glorifies
Till God 's aglow, to the loving eyes,
 In what was mere earth before.

III.

Yes, earth — yes, mere ignoble earth!
 Now do I mis-state, mistake?
Do I wrong your weakness and call it worth?
Expect all harvest, dread no dearth,
 Seal my sense up for your sake?

IV.

Oh, Love, Love, no, Love! not so, indeed!
 You were just weak earth, I knew:
With much in you waste, with many a weed,
And plenty of passions run to seed,
 But a little good grain too.

V.

And such as you were, I took you for mine:
 Did not you find me yours,
To watch the olive and wait the vine,
And wonder when rivers of oil and wine
 Would flow, as the Book assures?

VI.

Well, and if none of these good things came,
 What did the failure prove?
The man was my whole world, all the same,
With his flowers to praise or his weeds to blame,
 And, either or both, to love.

VII.

Yet this turns now to a fault—there! there!
  That I do love, watch too long,
And wait too well, and weary and wear;
And 't is all an old story, and my despair
  Fit subject for some new song:

VIII.

"How the light, light love, he has wings to fly
  At suspicion of a bond:
My wisdom has bidden your pleasure good-bye,
Which will turn up next in a laughing eye,
  And why should you look beyond?"

V.

ON THE CLIFF.

I.

I LEANED on the turf,
I looked at a rock
Left dry by the surf;
For the turf, to call it grass were to mock:
Dead to the roots, so deep was done
The work of the summer sun.

II.

And the rock lay flat
As an anvil's face:
No iron like that!
Baked dry; of a weed, of a shell, no trace:
Sunshine outside, but ice at the core,
Death's altar by the lone shore.

III.

On the turf, sprang gay
With his films of blue,
No cricket, I 'll say,
But a warhorse, barded and chanfroned too,
The gift of a quixote-mage to his knight,
Real fairy, with wings all right.

IV.

On the rock, they scorch
Like a drop of fire
From a brandished torch,
Fall two red fans of a butterfly:
No turf, no rock: in their ugly stead,
See, wonderful blue and red!

V.

Is it not so
With the minds of men?
The level and low,
The burnt and bare, in themselves; but then
With such a blue and red grace, not theirs, —
Love settling unawares!

VI.

READING A BOOK, UNDER THE CLIFF.

I.

"Still ailing, Wind? Wilt be appeased or no?
Which needs the other's office, thou or I?
Dost want to be disburdened of a woe,
And can, in truth, my voice untie
Its links, and let it go?

II.

"Art thou a dumb, wronged thing that would be righted,
Entrusting thus thy cause to me? Forbear!
No tongue can mend such pleadings; faith, requited
With falsehood, — love, at last aware
Of scorn, — hopes, early blighted, —

III.

"We have them; but I know not any tone
So fit as thine to falter forth a sorrow:
Dost think men would go mad without a moan,
If they knew any way to borrow
A pathos like thy own?

IV.

"Which sigh wouldst mock, of all the sighs? The one
  So long escaping from lips starved and blue,
That lasts while on her pallet-bed the nun
  Stretches her length; her foot comes through
The straw she shivers on;

V.

"You had not thought she was so tall: and spent,
  Her shrunk lids open, her lean fingers shut
Close, close, their sharp and livid nails indent
  The clammy palm; then all is mute:
That way, the spirit went.

VI.

"Or wouldst thou rather that I understand
  Thy will to help me? — like the dog I found
Once, pacing sad this solitary strand,
  Who would not take my food, poor hound,
But whined and licked my hand."

VII.

All this, and more, comes from some young man's pride
  Of power to see, — in failure and mistake,
Relinquishment, disgrace, on every side, —
  Merely examples for his sake,
Helps to his path untried:

VIII.

Instances he must — simply recognize?
  Oh, more than so! — must, with a learner's zeal,
Make doubly prominent, twice emphasize,
  By added touches that reveal
The god in babe's disguise.

IX.

Oh, he knows what defeat means, and the rest!
  Himself the undefeated that shall be:
Failure, disgrace, he flings them you to test, —
  His triumph, in eternity
Too plainly manifest!

X.

Whence, judge if he learn forthwith what the wind
  Means in its moaning — by the happy prompt
Instinctive way of youth, I mean; for kind
  Calm years, exacting their accompt
Of pain, mature the mind:

XI.

And some midsummer morning, at the lull
  Just about daybreak, as he looks across
A sparkling foreign country, wonderful
  To the sea's edge for gloom and gloss,
Next minute must annul, —

XII.

Then, when the wind begins among the vines,
  So low, so low, what shall it say but this?
"Here is the change beginning, here the lines
  Circumscribe beauty, set to bliss
The limit time assigns."

XIII.

Nothing can be as it has been before;
  Better, so call it, only not the same.
To draw one beauty into our hearts' core,
  And keep it changeless! such our claim;
So answered, — Nevermore!

XIV.

Simple? Why this is the old woe o' the world;
  Tune, to whose rise and fall we live and die.
Rise with it, then! Rejoice that man is hurled
  From change to change unceasingly,
His soul's wings never furled!

XV.

That 's a new question; still replies the fact,
  Nothing endures: the wind moans, saying so;
We moan in acquiescence: there 's life's pact.
  Perhaps probation — do *I* know?
God does: endure his act!

XVI.

Only, for man, how bitter not to grave
  On his soul's hands' palms one fair good wise thing

Just as he grasped it! For himself, death's wave;
While time first washes — ah, the sting! —
O'er all he 'd sink to save.

VII.

AMONG THE ROCKS.

I.

Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
This autumn morning! How he sets his bones
To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet
For the ripple to run over in its mirth;
Listening the while, where on the heap of stones
The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.

II.

That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true;
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.
If you loved only what were worth your love,
Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you:
Make the low nature better by your throes!
Give earth yourself, go up for gain above!

VIII.

BESIDE THE DRAWING-BOARD.

I.

"As like as a Hand to another Hand!"
Whoever said that foolish thing,
Could not have studied to understand
The counsels of God in fashioning,
Out of the infinite love of his heart,
This Hand, whose beauty I praise, apart
From the world of wonder left to praise,
If I tried to learn the other ways
Of love in its skill, or love in its power.
"As like as a Hand to another Hand:"
Who said that, never took his stand,
Found and followed, like me, an hour,
The beauty in this, — how free, how fine

To fear, almost, — of the limit-line!
As I looked at this, and learned and drew,
  Drew and learned, and looked again,
While fast the happy minutes flew,
  Its beauty mounted into my brain,
  And a fancy seized me; I was fain
To efface my work, begin anew,
Kiss what before I only drew;
Ay, laying the red chalk 'twixt my lips,
  With soul to help if the mere lips failed,
  I kissed all right where the drawing ailed,
Kissed fast the grace that somehow slips
Still from one's soulless finger-tips.

II.

'T is a clay cast, the perfect thing,
  From Hand live once, dead long ago:
Princess-like it wears the ring
  To fancy's eye, by which we know
That here at length a master found
  His match, a proud lone soul its mate,
As soaring genius sank to ground,
  And pencil could not emulate
The beauty in this, — how free, how fine
To fear almost! — of the limit-line.
Long ago the god, like me
The worm, learned, each in our degree:
Looked and loved, learned and drew,
  Drew and learned and loved again,
While fast the happy minutes flew,
  Till beauty mounted into his brain
And on the finger which outvied
  His art he placed the ring that 's there,
Still by fancy's eye descried,
  In token of a marriage rare:
For him on earth, his art's despair,
For him in heaven, his soul's fit bride.

III.

Little girl with the poor coarse hand
  I turned from to a cold clay cast —
I have my lesson, understand
  The worth of flesh and blood at last!
Nothing but beauty in a Hand?
  Because he could not change the hue,
  Mend the lines and make them true

To this which met his soul's demand, —
  Would Da Vinci turn from you?
I hear him laugh my woes to scorn —
"The fool forsooth is all forlorn
Because the beauty, she thinks best,
Lived long ago or was never born, —
Because no beauty bears the test
In this rough peasant Hand! Confessed
'Art is null and study void!'
So sayest thou? So said not I,
Who threw the faulty pencil by,
And years instead of hours employed,
Learning the veritable use
Of flesh and bone and nerve beneath
Lines and hue of the outer sheath,
If haply I might reproduce
One motive of the powers profuse,
Flesh and bone and nerve that make
The poorest coarsest human hand
An object worthy to be scanned
A whole life long for their sole sake.
Shall earth and the cramped moment-space
Yield the heavenly crowning grace?
Now the parts and then the whole!
Who art thou, with stinted soul
And stunted body, thus to cry,
'I love, — shall that be life's strait dole?
I must live beloved or die!'
This peasant hand that spins the wool
And bakes the bread, why lives it on,
Poor and coarse with beauty gone, —
What use survives the beauty?" Fool!

Go, little girl with the poor coarse hand!
I have my lesson, shall understand.

IX.

ON DECK.

I.

There is nothing to remember in me,
  Nothing I ever said with a grace,
Nothing I did that you care to see,

Nothing I was that deserves a place
In your mind, now I leave you, set you free.

II.

Conceded! In turn, concede to me,
Such things have been as a mutual flame.
Your soul 's locked fast; but, love for a key,
You might let it loose, till I grew the same
In your eyes, as in mine you stand: strange plea!

III.

For then, then, what would it matter to me
That I was the harsh, ill-favored one?
We both should be like as pea and pea;
It was ever so since the world begun:
So, let me proceed with my reverie.

IV.

How strange it were if you had all me,
As I have all you in my heart and brain,
You, whose least word brought gloom or glee,
Who never lifted the hand in vain —
Will hold mine yet, from over the sea!

V.

Strange, if a face, when you thought of me,
Rose like your own face present now,
With eyes as dear in their due degree,
Much such a mouth, and as bright a brow,
Till you saw yourself, while you cried "'T is She!"

VI.

Well, you may, you must, set down to me
Love that was life, life that was love;
A tenure of breath at your lips' decree,
A passion to stand as your thoughts approve,
A rapture to fall where your foot might be.

VII.

But did one touch of such love for me
Come in a word or a look of yours,
Whose words and looks will, circling, flee
Round me and round while life endures, —
Could I fancy "As I feel, thus feels He;"

VIII.

Why, fade you might to a thing like me,
  And your hair grow these coarse hanks of hair,
Your skin, this bark of a gnarled tree, —
  You might turn myself! — should I know or care,
When I should be dead of joy, James Lee?

GOLD HAIR.

A STORY OF PORNIC.

I.

Oh, the beautiful girl, too white,
  Who lived at Pornic, down by the sea,
Just where the sea and the Loire unite!
  And a boasted name in Brittany
She bore, which I will not write.

II.

Too white, for the flower of life is red;
  Her flesh was the soft seraphic screen
Of a soul that is meant (her parents said)
  To just see earth, and hardly be seen,
And blossom in heaven instead.

III.

Yet earth saw one thing, one how fair!
  One grace that grew to its full on earth:
Smiles might be sparse on her cheek so spare,
  And her waist want half a girdle's girth,
But she had her great gold hair.

IV.

Hair, such a wonder of flix and floss,
  Freshness and fragrance — floods of it, too!
Gold, did I say? Nay, gold 's mere dross:
  Here, Life smiled, "Think what I meant to do!"
And Love sighed, "Fancy my loss!"

V.

So, when she died, it was scarce more strange
  Than that, when delicate evening dies,

And you follow its spent sun's pallid range,
  There 's a shoot of color startles the skies
With sudden, violent change,—

VI.

That, while the breath was nearly to seek,
  As they put the little cross to her lips,
She changed; a spot came out on her cheek,
  A spark from her eye in mid-eclipse,
And she broke forth, "I must speak!"

VII.

"Not my hair!" made the girl her moan—
  "All the rest is gone or to go;
But the last, last grace, my all, my own,
  Let it stay in the grave, that the ghosts may know!
Leave my poor gold hair alone!"

VIII.

The passion thus vented, dead lay she;
  Her parents sobbed their worst on that;
All friends joined in, nor observed degree:
  For indeed the hair was to wonder at,
As it spread—not flowing free,

IX.

But curled around her brow, like a crown,
  And coiled beside her cheeks, like a cap,
And calmed about her neck—ay, down
  To her breast, pressed flat, without a gap
I' the gold, it reached her gown.

X.

All kissed that face, like a silver wedge
  'Mid the yellow wealth, nor disturbed its hair:
E'en the priest allowed death's privilege,
  As he planted the crucifix with care
On her breast, 'twixt edge and edge.

XI.

And thus was she buried, inviolate
  Of body and soul, in the very space
By the altar; keeping saintly state
  In Pornic church, for her pride of race,
Pure life and piteous fate.

XII.

And in after-time would your fresh tear fall,
  Though your mouth might twitch with a dubious smile,
As they told you of gold, both robe and pall,
  How she prayed them leave it alone awhile,
So it never was touched at all.

XIII.

Years flew; this legend grew at last
  The life of the lady; all she had done,
All been, in the memories fading fast
  Of lover and friend, was summed in one
Sentence survivors passed:

XIV.

To wit, she was meant for heaven, not earth;
  Had turned an angel before the time:
Yet, since she was mortal, in such dearth
  Of frailty, all you could count a crime
Was — she knew her gold hair's worth.

XV.

At little pleasant Pornic church,
  It chanced, the pavement wanted repair,
Was taken to pieces: left in the lurch,
  A certain sacred space lay bare,
And the boys began research.

XVI.

'T was the space where our sires would lay a saint,
  A benefactor, — a bishop, suppose,
A baron with armor-adornments quaint,
  Dame with chased ring and jewelled rose,
Things sanctity saves from taint;

XVII.

So we come to find them in after-days
  When the corpse is presumed to have done with gauds
Of use to the living, in many ways:
  For the boys get pelf, and the town applauds,
And the church deserves the praise.

XVIII.

They grubbed with a will: and at length — *O cor*
Humanum, pectora cœca, and the rest! —
They found — no gaud they were prying for,
No ring, no rose, but — who would have guessed? —
A double Louis-d'or!

XIX.

Here was a case for the priest: he heard,
Marked, inwardly digested, laid
Finger on nose, smiled, "There 's a bird
Chirps in my ear:" then, "Bring a spade,
Dig deeper!" — he gave the word.

XX.

And lo, when they came to the coffin-lid,
Or rotten planks which composed it once,
Why, there lay the girl's skull wedged amid
A mint of money, it served for the nonce
To hold in its hair-heaps hid!

XXI.

Hid there? Why? Could the girl be wont
(She the stainless soul) to treasure up
Money, earth's trash and heaven's affront?
Had a spider found out the communion-cup,
Was a toad in the christening-font?

XXII.

Truth is truth: too true it was.
Gold! She hoarded and hugged it first,
Longed for it, leaned o'er it, loved it — alas —
Till the humor grew to a head and burst,
And she cried, at the final pass, —

XXIII.

"Talk not of God, my heart is stone!
Nor lover nor friend — be gold for both!
Gold I lack; and, my all, my own,
It shall hide in my hair. I scarce die loth
If they let my hair alone!"

XXIV.

Louis-d'or, some six times five,
And duly double, every piece.

Now, do you see? With the priest to shrive,
  With parents preventing her soul's release
By kisses that kept alive, —

XXV.

With heaven's gold gates about to ope,
  With friends' praise, gold-like, lingering still,
An instinct had bidden the girl's hand grope
  For gold, the true sort — "Gold in heaven, if you will;
But I keep earth's too, I hope."

XXVI.

Enough! The priest took the grave's grim yield:
  The parents, they eyed that price of sin
As if *thirty pieces* lay revealed
  On the place *to bury strangers in*,
The hideous Potter's Field.

XXVII.

But the priest bethought him: "'Milk that 's spilt'
  — You know the adage! Watch and pray!
Saints tumble to earth with so slight a tilt!
  It would build a new altar; that, we may!"
And the altar therewith was built.

XXVIII.

Why I deliver this horrible verse?
  As the text of a sermon, which now I preach:
Evil or good may be better or worse
  In the human heart, but the mixture of each
Is a marvel and a curse.

XXIX.

The candid incline to surmise of late
  That the Christian faith proves false, I find;
For our Essays-and-Reviews' debate
  Begins to tell on the public mind,
And Colenso's words have weight:

XXX.

I still, to suppose it true, for my part,
  See reasons and reasons; this, to begin:
'T is the faith that launched point-blank her dart
  At the head of a lie — taught Original Sin,
The Corruption of Man's Heart.

THE WORST OF IT.

I.

Would it were I had been false, not you!
  I that am nothing, not you that are all:
I, never the worse for a touch or two
  On my speckled hide; not you, the pride
Of the day, my swan, that a first fleck's fall
  On her wonder of white must unswan, undo!

II.

I had dipped in life's struggle and, out again,
  Bore specks of it here, there, easy to see,
When I found my swan and the cure was plain;
  The dull turned bright as I caught your white
On my bosom: you saved me — saved in vain
  If you ruined yourself, and all through me!

III.

Yes, all through the speckled beast that I am,
  Who taught you to stoop; you gave me yourself,
And bound your soul by the vows that damn:
  Since on better thought you break, as you ought,
Vows — words, no angel set down, some elf
  Mistook, — for an oath, an epigram!

IV.

Yes, might I judge you, here were my heart,
  And a hundred its like, to treat as you pleased!
I choose to be yours, for my proper part,
  Yours, leave or take, or mar me or make;
If I acquiesce, why should you be teased
  With the conscience-prick and the memory-smart?

V.

But what will God say? Oh, my sweet,
  Think, and be sorry you did this thing!
Though earth were unworthy to feel your feet,
  There's a heaven above may deserve your love:
Should you forfeit heaven for a snapt gold ring
  And a promise broke, were it just or meet?

VI.

And I to have tempted you! I, who tried
  Your soul, no doubt, till it sank! Unwise,

I loved, and was lowly, loved and aspired,
  Loved, grieving or glad, till I made you mad,
And you meant to have hated and despised —
  Whereas, you deceived me nor inquired!

VII.

She, ruined? How? No heaven for her?
  Crowns to give, and none for the brow
That looked like marble and smelt like myrrh?
  Shall the robe be worn, and the palm-branch borne,
And she go graceless, she graced now
  Beyond all saints, as themselves aver?

VIII.

Hardly! That must be understood!
  The earth is your place of penance, then;
And what will it prove? I desire your good,
  But, plot as I may, I can find no way
How a blow should fall, such as falls on men,
  Nor prove too much for your womanhood.

IX.

It will come, I suspect, at the end of life,
  When you walk alone, and review the past;
And I, who so long shall have done with strife,
  And journeyed my stage and earned my wage
And retired as was right, — I am called at last
  When the devil stabs you, to lend the knife.

X.

He stabs for the minute of trivial wrong,
  Nor the other hours are able to save,
The happy, that lasted my whole life long:
  For a promise broke, not for first words spoke,
The true, the only, that turn my grave
  To a blaze of joy and a crash of song.

XI.

Witness beforehand! Off I trip
  On a safe path gay through the flowers you flung:
My very name made great by your lip,
  And my heart aglow with the good I know
Of a perfect year when we both were young,
  And I tasted the angels' fellowship.

XII.

And witness, moreover . . . Ah, but wait!
  I spy the loop whence an arrow shoots!
It may be for yourself, when you meditate,
  That you grieve — for slain ruth, murdered truth:
"Though falsehood escape in the end, what boots?
  How truth would have triumphed!" — you sigh too late.

XIII.

Ay, who would have triumphed like you, I say!
  Well, it is lost now; well, you must bear,
Abide and grow fit for a better day:
  You should hardly grudge, could I be your judge!
But hush! For you, can be no despair:
  There 's amends: 't is a secret: hope and pray!

XIV.

For I was true at least — oh, true enough!
  And, Dear, truth is not as good as it seems!
Commend me to conscience! Idle stuff!
  Much help is in mine, as I mope and pine,
And skulk through day, and scowl in my dreams
  At my swan's obtaining the crow's rebuff.

XV.

Men tell me of truth now — "False!" I cry:
  Of beauty — "A mask, friend! Look beneath!"
We take our own method, the devil and I,
  With pleasant and fair and wise and rare:
And the best we wish to what lives, is — death;
  Which even in wishing, perhaps we lie!

XVI.

Far better commit a fault and have done —
  As you, Dear! — forever; and choose the pure,
And look where the healing waters run,
  And strive and strain to be good again,
And a place in the other world ensure,
  All glass and gold, with God for its sun.

XVII.

Misery! What shall I say or do?
  I cannot advise, or, at least, persuade:
Most like, you are glad you deceived me — rue
  No whit of the wrong: you endured too long,

Have done no evil and want no aid,
  Will live the old life out and chance the new.

XVIII.

And your sentence is written all the same,
  And I can do nothing, — pray, perhaps:
But somehow the world pursues its game, —
  If I pray, if I curse, — for better or worse:
And my faith is torn to a thousand scraps,
  And my heart feels ice while my words breathe flame.

XIX.

Dear, I look from my hiding-place.
  Are you still so fair? Have you still the eyes?
Be happy! Add but the other grace,
  Be good! Why want what the angels vaunt?
I knew you once: but in Paradise,
  If we meet, I will pass nor turn my face.

DÎS ALITER VISUM;

OR,

LE BYRON DE NOS JOURS.

I.

Stop, let me have the truth of that!
  Is that all true? I say, the day
Ten years ago when both of us
  Met on a morning, friends — as thus
We meet this evening, friends or what? —

II.

Did you — because I took your arm
  And sillily smiled, "A mass of brass
That sea looks, blazing underneath!"
  While up the cliff-road edged with heath,
We took the turns nor came to harm —

III.

Did you consider, "Now makes twice
  That I have seen her, walked and talked
With this poor pretty thoughtful thing,
  Whose worth I weigh: she tries to sing;
Draws, hopes in time the eye grows nice;

IV.

"Reads verse and thinks she understands;
Loves all, at any rate, that 's great,
Good, beautiful; but much as we
Down at the bath-house love the sea,
Who breathe its salt and bruise its sands:

V.

"While . . . do but follow the fishing-gull
That flaps and floats from wave to cave!
There 's the sea-lover, fair my friend!
What then? Be patient, mark and mend!
Had you the making of your skull?"

VI.

And did you, when we faced the church
With spire and sad slate roof, aloof
From human fellowship so far,
Where a few graveyard crosses are,
And garlands for the swallows' perch, —

VII.

Did you determine, as we stepped
O'er the lone stone fence, "Let me get
Her for myself, and what 's the earth
With all its art, verse, music, worth —
Compared with love, found, gained, and kept?

VIII.

"Schumann 's our music-maker now;
Has his march-movement youth and mouth
Ingres 's the modern man that paints;
Which will lean on me, of his saints?
Heine for songs; for kisses, how?"

IX.

And did you, when we entered, reached
The votive frigate, soft aloft
Riding on air this hundred years,
Safe-smiling at old hopes and fears, —
Did you draw profit while she preached?

X.

Resolving, "Fools we wise men grow!
Yes, I could easily blurt out curt

Some question that might find reply
  As prompt in her stopped lips, dropped eye,
And rush of red to cheek and brow:

XI.

"Thus were a match made, sure and fast,
  'Mid the blue weed-flowers round the mound
Where, issuing, we shall stand and stay
  For one more look at baths and bay,
Sands, sea-gulls, and the old church last —

XII.

"A match 'twixt me, bent, wigged and lamed,
  Famous, however, for verse and worse,
Sure of the Fortieth spare Arm-chair
  When gout and glory seat me there,
So, one whose love-freaks pass unblamed, —

XIII.

"And this young beauty, round and sound
  As a mountain-apple, youth and truth
With loves and doves, at all events
  With money in the Three per Cents;
Whose choice of me would seem profound: —

XIV.

"She might take me as I take her.
  Perfect the hour would pass, alas!
Climb high, love high, what matter? Still,
  Feet, feelings, must descend the hill:
An hour's perfection can't recur.

XV.

"Then follows Paris and full time
  For both to reason: 'Thus with us!'
She 'll sigh, 'Thus girls give body and soul
  At first word, think they gain the goal,
When 't is the starting-place they climb!

XVI.

"'My friend makes verse and gets renown;
  Have they all fifty years, his peers?
He knows the world, firm, quiet and gay;
  Boys will become as much one day:
They 're fools; he cheats, with beard less brown.

XVII.

"'For boys say, *Love me or I die!*
He did not say, *The truth is, youth*
I want, who am old and know too much;
I'd catch youth: lend me sight and touch!
Drop heart's blood where life's wheels grate dry!'

XVIII.

"While I should make rejoinder" — (then
It was, no doubt, you ceased that least
Light pressure of my arm in yours) —
"'I can conceive of cheaper cures
For a yawning-fit o'er books and men.

XIX.

"'What? All I am, was, and might be,
All, books taught, art brought, life's whole strife,
Painful results since precious, just
Were fitly exchanged, in wise disgust,
For two cheeks freshened by youth and sea?

XX.

"'All for a nosegay! — what came first;
With fields on flower, untried each side;
I rally, need my books and men,
And find a nosegay:' drop it, then,
No match yet made for best or worst!"

XXI.

That ended me. You judged the porch
We left by, Norman; took our look
At sea and sky; wondered so few
Find out the place for air and view;
Remarked the sun began to scorch;

XXII.

Descended, soon regained the baths,
And then, good-bye! Years ten since then:
Ten years! We meet: you tell me, now,
By a window-seat for that cliff-brow,
On carpet-stripes for those sand-paths.

XXIII.

Now I may speak: you fool, for all
Your lore! WHO made things plain in vain?

What was the sea for? What, the gray
  Sad church, that solitary day,
Crosses and graves and swallows' call?

XXIV.

Was there nought better than to enjoy?
  No feat which, done, would make time break,
And let us pent-up creatures through
  Into eternity, our due?
No forcing earth teach heaven's employ?

XXV.

No wise beginning, here and now,
  What cannot grow complete (earth's feat)
And heaven must finish, there and then?
  No tasting earth's true food for men,
Its sweet in sad, its sad in sweet?

XXVI.

No grasping at love, gaining a share
  O' the sole spark from God's life at strife
With death, so, sure of range above
  The limits here? For us and love,
Failure; but, when God fails, despair.

XXVII.

This you call wisdom? Thus you add
  Good unto good again, in vain?
You loved, with body worn and weak;
  I loved, with faculties to seek:
Were both loves worthless since ill-clad?

XXVIII.

Let the mere star-fish in his vault
  Crawl in a wash of weed, indeed,
Rose-jacynth to the finger-tips:
  He, whole in body and soul, outstrips
Man, found with either in default.

XXIX.

But what 's whole, can increase no more,
  Is dwarfed and dies, since here 's its sphere.
The devil laughed at you in his sleeve!
  You knew not? That I well believe;
Or you had saved two souls: nay, four.

XXX.

For Stephanie sprained last night her wrist,
  Ankle or something. "Pooh," cry you?
At any rate she danced, all say,
  Vilely; her vogue has had its day.
Here comes my husband from his whist.

TOO LATE.

I.

HERE was I with my arm and heart
  And brain, all yours for a word, a want
Put into a look — just a look, your part, —
  While mine, to repay it . . . vainest vaunt,
Were the woman, that 's dead, alive to hear,
  Had her lover, that 's lost, love's proof to show!
But I cannot show it; you cannot speak
  From the churchyard neither, miles removed,
Though I feel by a pulse within my cheek,
  Which stabs and stops, that the woman I loved
Needs help in her grave and finds none near,
  Wants warmth from the heart which sends it — so!

II.

Did I speak once angrily, all the drear days
  You lived, you woman I loved so well,
Who married the other? Blame or praise,
  Where was the use then? Time would tell,
And the end declare what man for you,
  What woman for me, was the choice of God.
But, Edith dead! no doubting more!
  I used to sit and look at my life
As it rippled and ran till, right before,
  A great stone stopped it: oh, the strife
Of waves at the stone some devil threw
  In my life's midcurrent, thwarting God!

III.

But either I thought, "They may churn and chide
  Awhile, my waves which came for their joy
And found this horrible stone full-tide:
  Yet I see just a thread escape, deploy
Through the evening-country, silent and safe,

And it suffers no more till it finds the sea."
Or else I would think, "Perhaps some night
When new things happen, a meteor-ball
May slip through the sky in a line of light,
And earth breathe hard, and landmarks fall,
And my waves no longer champ nor chafe,
Since a stone will have rolled from its place: let be!"

IV.

But, dead! All 's done with: wait who may,
Watch and wear and wonder who will.
Oh, my whole life that ends to-day!
Oh, my soul's sentence, sounding still,
"The woman is dead, that was none of his;
And the man, that was none of hers, may go!"
There 's only the past left: worry that!
Wreak, like a bull, on the empty coat,
Rage, its late wearer is laughing at!
Tear the collar to rags, having missed his throat;
Strike stupidly on — "This, this and this,
Where I would that a bosom received the blow!"

V.

I ought to have done more: once my speech,
And once your answer, and there, the end,
And Edith was henceforth out of reach!
Why, men do more to deserve a friend,
Be rid of a foe, get rich, grow wise,
Nor, folding their arms, stare fate in the face.
Why, better even have burst like a thief
And borne you away to a rock for us two,
In a moment's horror, bright, bloody and brief,
Then changed to myself again — "I slew
Myself in that moment; a ruffian lies
Somewhere: your slave, see, born in his place!"

VI.

What did the other do? You be judge!
Look at us, Edith! Here are we both!
Give him his six whole years: I grudge
None of the life with you, nay, loathe
Myself that I grudged his start in advance
Of me who could overtake and pass.
But, as if he loved you! No, not he,
Nor any one else in the world, 't is plain:
Who ever heard that another, free

As I, young, prosperous, sound and sane,
Poured life out, proffered it — "Half a glance
Of those eyes of yours and I drop the glass!"

VII.

Handsome, were you? 'T is more than they held,
More than they said; I was 'ware and watched:
I was the scapegrace, this rat belled
The cat, this fool got his whiskers scratched:
The others? No head that was turned, no heart
Broken, my lady, assure yourself!
Each soon made his mind up; so and so
Married a dancer, such and such
Stole his friend's wife, stagnated slow,
Or maundered, unable to do as much,
And muttered of peace where he had no part:
While, hid in the closet, laid on the shelf, —

VIII.

On the whole, you were let alone, I think!
So, you looked to the other, who acquiesced;
My rival, the proud man, — prize your pink
Of poets! A poet he was! I've guessed:
He rhymed you his rubbish nobody read,
Loved you and doved you — did not I laugh!
There was a prize! But we both were tried.
Oh, heart of mine, marked broad with her mark,
Tekel, found wanting, set aside,
Scorned! See, I bleed these tears in the dark
Till comfort come and the last be bled:
He? He is tagging your epitaph.

IX.

If it would only come over again!
— Time to be patient with me, and probe
This heart till you punctured the proper vein,
Just to learn what blood is: twitch the robe
From that blank lay-figure your fancy draped,
Prick the leathern heart till the — verses spirt!
And late it was easy; late, you walked
Where a friend might meet you; Edith's name
Arose to one's lip if one laughed or talked;
If I heard good news, you heard the same;
When I woke, I knew that your breath escaped;
I could bide my time, keep alive, alert.

X.

And alive I shall keep and long, you will see!
  I knew a man, was kicked like a dog
From gutter to cesspool; what cared he
  So long as he picked from the filth his prog?
He saw youth, beauty and genius die,
  And jollily lived to his hundredth year.
But I will live otherwise: none of such life!
  At once I begin as I mean to end.
Go on with the world, get gold in its strife,
  Give your spouse the slip and betray your friend!
There are two who decline, a woman and I,
  And enjoy our death in the darkness here.

XI.

I liked that way you had with your curls
  Wound to a ball in a net behind:
Your cheek was chaste as a Quaker-girl's,
  And your mouth — there was never, to my mind,
Such a funny mouth, for it would not shut;
  And the dented chin too — what a chin!
There were certain ways when you spoke, some words
  That you know you never could pronounce:
You were thin, however; like a bird's
  Your hand seemed — some would say, the pounce
Of a scaly-footed hawk — all but!
  The world was right when it called you thin.

XII.

But I turn my back on the world: I take
  Your hand, and kneel, and lay to my lips.
Bid me live, Edith! Let me slake
  Thirst at your presence! Fear no slips:
'T is your slave shall pay, while his soul endures,
  Full due, love's whole debt, *summum jus.*
My queen shall have high observance, planned
  Courtship made perfect, no least line
Crossed without warrant. There you stand,
  Warm too, and white too: would this wine
Had washed all over that body of yours,
  Ere I drank it, and you down with it, thus!

ABT VOGLER.

(AFTER HE HAS BEEN EXTEMPORIZING UPON THE MUSICAL INSTRUMENT OF HIS INVENTION.)

I.

Would that the structure brave, the manifold music I build,
Bidding my organ obey, calling its keys to their work,
Claiming each slave of the sound, at a touch, as when Solomon willed
Armies of angels that soar, legions of demons that lurk,
Man, brute, reptile, fly, — alien of end and of aim,
Adverse, each from the other heaven-high, hell-deep removed, —
Should rush into sight at once as he named the ineffable Name,
And pile him a palace straight, to pleasure the princess he loved!

II.

Would it might tarry like his, the beautiful building of mine,
This which my keys in a crowd pressed and importuned to raise!
Ah, one and all, how they helped, would dispart now and now combine,
Zealous to hasten the work, heighten their master his praise!
And one would bury his brow with a blind plunge down to hell,
Burrow awhile and build, broad on the roots of things,
Then up again swim into sight, having based me my palace well,
Founded it, fearless of flame, flat on the nether springs.

III.

And another would mount and march, like the excellent minion he was,
Ay, another and yet another, one crowd but with many a crest,
Raising my rampired walls of gold as transparent as glass,
Eager to do and die, yield each his place to the rest:
For higher still and higher (as a runner tips with fire,
When a great illumination surprises a festal night —
Outlining round and round Rome's dome from space to spire)
Up, the pinnacled glory reached, and the pride of my soul was in sight.

IV.

In sight? Not half! for it seemed, it was certain, to match man's birth,
  Nature in turn conceived, obeying an impulse as I;
And the emulous heaven yearned down, made effort to reach the earth,
  As the earth had done her best, in my passion, to scale the sky:
Novel splendors burst forth, grew familiar and dwelt with mine,
  Not a point nor peak but found and fixed its wandering star;
Meteor-moons, balls of blaze: and they did not pale nor pine,
  For earth had attained to heaven, there was no more near nor far.

V.

Nay more; for there wanted not who walked in the glare and glow,
  Presences plain in the place; or, fresh from the Protoplast,
Furnished for ages to come, when a kindlier wind should blow,
  Lured now to begin and live, in a house to their liking at last;
Or else the wonderful Dead who have passed through the body and gone,
  But were back once more to breathe in an old world worth their new:
What never had been, was now; what was, as it shall be anon;
  And what is, — shall I say, matched both? for I was made perfect too.

VI.

All through my keys that gave their sounds to a wish of my soul,
  All through my soul that praised as its wish flowed visibly forth,
All through music and me! For think, had I painted the whole,
  Why, there it had stood, to see, nor the process so wonder-worth:
Had I written the same, made verse — still, effect proceeds from cause,
  Ye know why the forms are fair, ye hear how the tale is told;
It is all triumphant art, but art in obedience to laws,
  Painter and poet are proud in the artist-list enrolled: —

VII.

But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
Existent behind all laws, that made them and, lo, they are!
And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star.
Consider it well: each tone of our scale in itself is nought;
It is everywhere in the world — loud, soft, and all is said:
Give it to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought:
And, there! Ye have heard and seen: consider and bow the head!

VIII.

Well, it is gone at last, the palace of music I reared;
Gone! and the good tears start, the praises that come too slow;
For one is assured at first, one scarce can say that he feared,
That he even gave it a thought, the gone thing was to go.
Never to be again! But many more of the kind
As good, nay, better perchance: is this your comfort to me?
To me, who must be saved because I cling with my mind
To the same, same self, same love, same God: ay, what was, shall be.

IX.

Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable Name?
Builder and maker, Thou, of houses not made with hands!
What, have fear of change from Thee who art ever the same?
Doubt that Thy power can fill the heart that Thy power expands?
There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before;
The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound;
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;
On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round

X.

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good, shall exist;
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
Enough that he heard it once: we shall hear it by-and-by.

XI.

And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
For the fulness of the days? Have we withered or agonized?
Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue thence?
Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony should be prized?
Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe:
But God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear;
The rest may reason and welcome: 't is we musicians know.

XII.

Well, it is earth with me; silence resumes her reign:
I will be patient and proud, and soberly acquiesce.
Give me the keys. I feel for the common chord again,
Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor, — yes,
And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien ground,
Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep;
Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my resting-place is found,
The C Major of this life: so, now I will try to sleep.

RABBI BEN EZRA.

I.

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"

II.

Not that, amassing flowers,
Youth sighed, "Which rose make ours,
Which lily leave and then as best recall?"
Not that, admiring stars,
It yearned, "Nor Jove, nor Mars;
Mine be some figured flame which blends, transcends them all!"

III.

Not for such hopes and fears
Annulling youth's brief years,

Do I remonstrate: folly wide the mark!
Rather I prize the doubt
Low kinds exist without,
Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.

IV.

Poor vaunt of life indeed,
Were man but formed to feed
On joy, to solely seek and find and feast;
Such feasting ended, then
As sure an end to men;
Irks care the crop full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed beast?

V.

Rejoice we are allied
To That which doth provide
And not partake, effect and not receive!
A spark disturbs our clod;
Nearer we hold of God
Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must believe.

VI.

Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three-parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!

VII.

For thence, — a paradox
Which comforts while it mocks, —
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail:
What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me:
A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale.

VIII.

What is he but a brute
Whose flesh has soul to suit,
Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play?
To man, propose this test —
Thy body at its best,
How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?

IX.

Yet gifts should prove their use:
I own the Past profuse
Of power each side, perfection every turn:
Eyes, ears took in their dole,
Brain treasured up the whole;
Should not the heart beat once "How good to live and learn"?

X.

Not once beat "Praise be Thine!
I see the whole design,
I, who saw power, see now Love perfect too:
Perfect I call Thy plan:
Thanks that I was a man!
Maker, remake, complete, — I trust what Thou shalt do!"

XI.

For pleasant is this flesh;
Our soul, in its rose-mesh
Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest:
Would we some prize might hold
To match those manifold
Possessions of the brute, — gain most, as we did best!

XII.

Let us not always say,
"Spite of this flesh to-day
I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!"
As the bird wings and sings,
Let us cry, "All good things
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul!"

XIII.

Therefore I summon age
To grant youth's heritage,
Life's struggle having so far reached its term:
Thence shall I pass, approved
A man, for aye removed
From the developed brute; a God though in the germ.

XIV.

And I shall thereupon
Take rest, ere I be gone
Once more on my adventure brave and new:
Fearless and unperplexed,

When I wage battle next,
What weapons to select, what armor to indue.

XV.

Youth ended, I shall try
My gain or loss thereby;
Leave the fire-ashes, what survives is gold:
And I shall weigh the same,
Give life its praise or blame:
Young, all lay in dispute; I shall know, being old.

XVI.

For note, when evening shuts,
A certain moment cuts
The deed off, calls the glory from the gray:
A whisper from the west
Shoots — "Add this to the rest,
Take it and try its worth: here dies another day."

XVII.

So, still within this life,
Though lifted o'er its strife,
Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last,
"This rage was right i' the main,
That acquiescence vain:
The Future I may face now I have proved the Past."

XVIII.

For more is not reserved
To man, with soul just nerved
To act to-morrow what he learns to-day:
Here, work enough to watch
The Master work, and catch
Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play.

XIX.

As it was better, youth
Should strive, through acts uncouth,
Toward making, than repose on aught found made:
So, better, age, exempt
From strife, should know, than tempt
Further. Thou waitedst age: wait death nor be afraid!

XX.

Enough now, if the Right
And Good and Infinite

Be named here, as thou callest thy hand thine own,
With knowledge absolute,
Subject to no dispute
From fools that crowded youth, nor let thee feel alone.

XXI.

Be there, for once and all,
Severed great minds from small,
Announced to each his station in the Past!
Was I, the world arraigned,
Were they, my soul disdained,
Right? Let age speak the truth and give us peace at last!

XXII.

Now, who shall arbitrate?
Ten men love what I hate,
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive;
Ten, who in ears and eyes
Match me: we all surmise,
They this thing, and I that: whom shall my soul believe?

XXIII.

Not on the vulgar mass
Called "work," must sentence pass,
Things done, that took the eye and had the price;
O'er which, from level stand,
The low world laid its hand,
Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice:

XXIV.

But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
So passed in making up the main account;
All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure,
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount:

XXV.

Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

XXVI.

Ay, note that Potter's wheel,
That metaphor! and feel
Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,—
Thou, to whom fools propound,
When the wine makes its round,
"Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize to-day!"

XXVII.

Fool! All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:
What entered into thee,
That was, is, and shall be:
Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay endure.

XXVIII.

He fixed thee 'mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest:
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

XXIX.

What though the earlier grooves,
Which ran the laughing loves
Around thy base, no longer pause and press?
What though, about thy rim,
Scull-things in order grim
Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress?

XXX.

Look not thou down but up!
To uses of a cup,
The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,
The new wine's foaming flow,
The Master's lips aglow!
Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what needst thou with earth's
wheel?

XXXI.

But I need, now as then,
Thee, God, who mouldest men;
And since, not even while the whirl was worst,

Did I — to the wheel of life
With shapes and colors rife,
Bound dizzily — mistake my end, to slake Thy thirst:

XXXII.

So, take and use Thy work:
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
My times be in Thy hand!
Perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!

A DEATH IN THE DESERT.

[Supposed of Pamphylax the Antiochene:
It is a parchment, of my rolls the fifth,
Hath three skins glued together, is all Greek,
And goeth from *Epsilon* down to *Mu*:
Lies second in the surnamed Chosen Chest,
Stained and conserved with juice of terebinth,
Covered with cloth of hair, and lettered *Xi*,
From Xanthus, my wife's uncle, now at peace:
Mu and *Epsilon* stand for my own name.
I may not write it, but I make a cross
To show I wait His coming, with the rest,
And leave off here: beginneth Pamphylax.]

I said, "If one should wet his lips with wine,
And slip the broadest plantain-leaf we find,
Or else the lappet of a linen robe,
Into the water-vessel, lay it right,
And cool his forehead just above the eyes,
The while a brother, kneeling either side,
Should chafe each hand and try to make it warm, —
He is not so far gone but he might speak."

This did not happen in the outer cave,
Nor in the secret chamber of the rock,
Where, sixty days since the decree was out,
We had him, bedded on a camel-skin,
And waited for his dying all the while;
But in the midmost grotto: since noon's light
Reached there a little, and we would not lose
The last of what might happen on his face.

I at the head, and Xanthus at the feet,
With Valens and the Boy, had lifted him,
And brought him from the chamber in the depths,
And laid him in the light where we might see:
For certain smiles began about his mouth,
And his lids moved, presageful of the end.

Beyond, and halfway up the mouth o' the cave,
The Bactrian convert, having his desire,
Kept watch, and made pretence to graze a goat
That gave us milk, on rags of various herb,
Plantain and quitch, the rocks' shade keeps alive:
So that if any thief or soldier passed,
(Because the persecution was aware,)
Yielding the goat up promptly with his life,
Such man might pass on, joyful at a prize,
Nor care to pry into the cool o' the cave.
Outside was all noon and the burning blue.

"Here is wine," answered Xanthus, — dropped a drop;
I stooped and placed the lap of cloth aright,
Then chafed his right hand, and the Boy his left:
But Valens had bethought him, and produced
And broke a ball of nard, and made perfume.
Only, he did — not so much wake, as — turn
And smile a little, as a sleeper does
If any dear one call him, touch his face —
And smiles and loves, but will not be disturbed.

Then Xanthus said a prayer, but still he slept:
It is the Xanthus that escaped to Rome,
Was burned, and could not write the chronicle.

Then the Boy sprang up from his knees, and ran,
Stung by the splendor of a sudden thought,
And fetched the seventh plate of graven lead
Out of the secret chamber, found a place,
Pressing with finger on the deeper dints,
And spoke, as 't were his mouth proclaiming first,
"I am the Resurrection and the Life."

Whereat he opened his eyes wide at once,
And sat up of himself, and looked at us;
And thenceforth nobody pronounced a word:
Only, outside, the Bactrian cried his cry
Like the lone desert-bird that wears the ruff,
As signal we were safe, from time to time.

First he said, "If a friend declared to me,
This my son Valens, this my other son,
Were James and Peter, — nay, declared as well
This lad was very John, — I could believe!
— Could, for a moment, doubtlessly believe:
So is myself withdrawn into my depths,
The soul retreated from the perished brain
Whence it was wont to feel and use the world
Through these dull members, done with long ago.
Yet I myself remain; I feel myself:
And there is nothing lost. Let be, awhile!"

[This is the doctrine he was wont to teach,
How divers persons witness in each man,
Three souls which make up one soul: first, to wit,
A soul of each and all the bodily parts,
Seated therein, which works, and is what Does,
And has the use of earth, and ends the man
Downward: but, tending upward for advice,
Grows into, and again is grown into
By the next soul, which, seated in the brain,
Useth the first with its collected use,
And feeleth, thinketh, willeth, — is what Knows:
Which, duly tending upward in its turn,
Grows into, and again is grown into
By the last soul, that uses both the first,
Subsisting whether they assist or no,
And, constituting man's self, is what Is —
And leans upon the former, makes it play,
As that played off the first: and, tending up,
Holds, is upheld by, God, and ends the man
Upward in that dread point of intercourse,
Nor needs a place, for it returns to Him.
What Does, what Knows, what Is; three souls, one man.
I give the glossa of Theotypas.]

And then, "A stick, once fire from end to end;
Now, ashes save the tip that holds a spark!
Yet, blow the spark, it runs back, spreads itself
A little where the fire was: thus I urge
The soul that served me, till it task once more
What ashes of my brain have kept their shape,
And these make effort on the last o' the flesh,
Trying to taste again the truth of things —"
(He smiled) — "their very superficial truth;
As that ye are my sons, that it is long

Since James and Peter had release by death,
And I am only he, your brother John,
Who saw and heard, and could remember all.
Remember all! It is not much to say.
What if the truth broke on me from above
As once and ofttimes? Such might hap again:
Doubtlessly He might stand in presence here,
With head wool-white, eyes flame, and feet like brass,
The sword and the seven stars, as I have seen—
I who now shudder only and surmise
'How did your brother bear that sight and live?'

"If I live yet, it is for good, more love
Through me to men: be nought but ashes here
That keep awhile my semblance, who was John,—
Still, when they scatter, there is left on earth
No one alive who knew (consider this!)
—Saw with his eyes and handled with his hands
That which was from the first, the Word of Life.
How will it be when none more saith 'I saw'?

"Such ever was love's way: to rise, it stoops.
Since I, whom Christ's mouth taught, was bidden teach,
I went, for many years, about the world,
Saying 'It was so; so I heard and saw,'
Speaking as the case asked: and men believed.
Afterward came the message to myself
In Patmos isle; I was not bidden teach,
But simply listen, take a book and write,
Nor set down other than the given word,
With nothing left to my arbitrament
To choose or change: I wrote, and men believed.
Then, for my time grew brief, no message more,
No call to write again, I found a way,
And, reasoning from my knowledge, merely taught
Men should, for love's sake, in love's strength, believe;
Or I would pen a letter to a friend
And urge the same as friend, nor less nor more:
Friends said I reasoned rightly, and believed.
But at the last, why, I seemed left alive
Like a sea-jelly weak on Patmos strand,
To tell dry sea-beach gazers how I fared
When there was mid-sea, and the mighty things;
Left to repeat, 'I saw, I heard, I knew,'
And go all over the old ground again,
With Antichrist already in the world,

And many Antichrists, who answered prompt,
'Am I not Jasper as thyself art John?
Nay, young, whereas through age thou mayest forget:
Wherefore, explain, or how shall we believe?'
I never thought to call down fire on such,
Or, as in wonderful and early days,
Pick up the scorpion, tread the serpent dumb;
But patient stated much of the Lord's life
Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work:
Since much that at the first, in deed and word,
Lay simply and sufficiently exposed,
Had grown (or else my soul was grown to match,
Fed through such years, familiar with such light,
Guarded and guided still to see and speak)
Of new significance and fresh result;
What first were guessed as points, I now knew stars,
And named them in the Gospel I have writ.
For men said, 'It is getting long ago:
Where is the promise of His coming?' — asked
These young ones in their strength, as loth to wait,
Of me who, when their sires were born, was old.
I, for I loved them, answered, joyfully,
Since I was there, and helpful in my age;
And, in the main, I think such men believed.
Finally, thus endeavoring, I fell sick,
Ye brought me here, and I supposed the end,
And went to sleep with one thought that, at least,
Though the whole earth should lie in wickedness,
We had the truth, might leave the rest to God.
Yet now I wake in such decrepitude
As I had slidden down and fallen afar,
Past even the presence of my former self,
Grasping the while for stay at facts which snap,
Till I am found away from my own world,
Feeling for foothold through a blank profound,
Along with unborn people in strange lands,
Who say — I hear said or conceive they say —
'Was John at all, and did he say he saw?
Assure us, ere we ask what he might see!'

"And how shall I assure them? Can they share
—They, who have flesh, a veil of youth and strength
About each spirit, that needs must bide its time,
Living and learning still as years assist
Which wear the thickness thin, and let man see —
With me who hardly am withheld at all,

But shudderingly, scarce a shred between,
Lie bare to the universal prick of light?
Is it for nothing we grow old and weak,
We whom God loves? When pain ends, gain ends too
To me, that story — ay, that Life and Death
Of which I wrote 'it was' — to me, it is;
— Is, here and now: I apprehend nought else.
Is not God now i' the world His power first made?
Is not His love at issue still with sin,
Visibly when a wrong is done on earth?
Love, wrong, and pain, what see I else around?
Yea, and the Resurrection and Uprise
To the right hand of the throne — what is it beside,
When such truth, breaking bounds, o'erfloods my soul,
And, as I saw the sin and death, even so
See I the need yet transiency of both,
The good and glory consummated thence?
I saw the power; I see the Love, once weak,
Resume the Power: and in this word 'I see,'
Lo, there is recognized the Spirit of both
That moving o'er the spirit of man, unblinds
His eye and bids him look. These are, I see;
But ye, the children, His beloved ones too,
Ye need, — as I should use an optic glass
I wondered at erewhile, somewhere i' the world,
It had been given a crafty smith to make;
A tube, he turned on objects brought too close,
Lying confusedly insubordinate
For the unassisted eye to master once:
Look through his tube, at distance now they lay,
Become succinct, distinct, so small, so clear!
Just thus, ye needs must apprehend what truth
I see, reduced to plain historic fact,
Diminished into clearness, proved a point
And far away: ye would withdraw your sense
From out eternity, strain it upon time,
Then stand before that fact, that Life and Death,
Stay there at gaze, till it dispart, dispread,
As though a star should open out, all sides,
Grow the world on you, as it is my world.

"For life, with all it yields of joy and woe,
And hope and fear, — believe the aged friend, —
Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,
How love might be, hath been indeed, and is;
And that we hold thenceforth to the uttermost

Such prize despite the envy of the world,
And, having gained truth, keep truth: that is all.
But see the double way wherein we are led,
How the soul learns diversely from the flesh!
With flesh, that hath so little time to stay,
And yields mere basement for the soul's emprise,
Expect prompt teaching. Helpful was the light,
And warmth was cherishing and food was choice
To every man's flesh, thousand years ago,
As now to yours and mine; the body sprang
At once to the height, and stayed: but the soul, — no!
Since sages who, this noontide, meditate
In Rome or Athens, may descry some point
Of the eternal power, hid yestereve;
And, as thereby the power's whole mass extends,
So much extends the æther floating o'er
The love that tops the might, the Christ in God.
Then, as new lessons shall be learned in these
Till earth's work stop and useless time run out,
So duly, daily, needs provision be
For keeping the soul's prowess possible,
Building new barriers as the old decay,
Saving us from evasion of life's proof,
Putting the question ever, 'Does God love,
And will ye hold that truth against the world?'
Ye know there needs no second proof with good
Gained for our flesh from any earthly source:
We might go freezing, ages, — give us fire,
Thereafter we judge fire at its full worth,
And guard it safe through every chance, ye know!
That fable of Prometheus and his theft,
How mortals gained Jove's fiery flower, grows old
(I have been used to hear the pagans own)
And out of mind; but fire, howe'er its birth,
Here is it, precious to the sophist now
Who laughs the myth of Æschylus to scorn,
As precious to those satyrs of his play,
Who touched it in gay wonder at the thing.
While were it so with the soul, — this gift of truth
Once grasped, were this our soul's gain safe, and sure
To prosper as the body's gain is wont, —
Why, man's probation would conclude, his earth
Crumble; for he both reasons and decides,
Weighs first, then chooses: will he give up fire
For gold or purple once he knows its worth?
Could he give Christ up were His worth as plain?

Therefore, I say, to test man, the proofs shift,
Nor may he grasp that fact like other fact,
And straightway in his life acknowledge it,
As, say, the indubitable bliss of fire.
Sigh ye, 'It had been easier once than now?'
To give you answer I am left alive;
Look at me who was present from the first!
Ye know what things I saw; then came a test,
My first, befitting me who so had seen:
'Forsake the Christ thou sawest transfigured, Him
Who trod the sea and brought the dead to life?
What should wring this from thee!'—ye laugh and ask.
What wrung it? Even a torchlight and a noise,
The sudden Roman faces, violent hands,
And fear of what the Jews might do! Just that,
And it is written, 'I forsook and fled:'
There was my trial, and it ended thus.
Ay, but my soul had gained its truth, could grow:
Another year or two,—what little child,
What tender woman that had seen no least
Of all my sights, but barely heard them told,
Who did not clasp the cross with a light laugh,
Or wrap the burning robe round, thanking God?
Well, was truth safe forever, then? Not so.
Already had begun the silent work
Whereby truth, deadened of its absolute blaze,
Might need love's eye to pierce the o'erstretched doubt.
Teachers were busy, whispering 'All is true
As the aged ones report; but youth can reach
Where age gropes dimly, weak with stir and strain,
And the full doctrine slumbers till to-day.'
Thus, what the Roman's lowered spear was found,
A bar to me who touched and handled truth,
Now proved the glozing of some new shrewd tongue,
This Ebion, this Cerinthus or their mates,
Till imminent was the outcry 'Save our Christ!'
Whereon I stated much of the Lord's life
Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work.
Such work done, as it will be, what comes next?
What do I hear say, or conceive men say,
'Was John at all, and did he say he saw?
Assure us, ere we ask what he might see!'

"Is this indeed a burden for late days,
And may I help to bear it with you all,
Using my weakness which becomes your strength?

For if a babe were born inside this grot,
Grew to a boy here, heard us praise the sun,
Yet had but yon sole glimmer in light's place, —
One loving him and wishful he should learn,
Would much rejoice himself was blinded first
Month by month here, so made to understand
How eyes, born darkling, apprehend amiss:
I think I could explain to such a child
There was more glow outside than gleams he caught,
Ay, nor need urge 'I saw it, so believe!'
It is a heavy burden you shall bear
In latter days, new lands, or old grown strange,
Left without me, which must be very soon.
What is the doubt, my brothers? Quick with it!
I see you stand conversing, each new face,
Either in fields, of yellow summer eves,
On islets yet unnamed amid the sea;
Or pace for shelter 'neath a portico
Out of the crowd in some enormous town
Where now the larks sing in a solitude;
Or muse upon blank heaps of stone and sand
Idly conjectured to be Ephesus:
And no one asks his fellow any more
'Where is the promise of His coming?' but
'Was He revealed in any of His lives,
As Power, as Love, as Influencing Soul?'

"Quick, for time presses, tell the whole mind out,
And let us ask and answer and be saved!
My book speaks on, because it cannot pass;
One listens quietly, nor scoffs but pleads,
'Here is a tale of things done ages since;
What truth was ever told the second day?
Wonders, that would prove doctrine, go for nought.
Remains the doctrine, love; well, we must love,
And what we love most, power and love in one,
Let us acknowledge on the record here,
Accepting these in Christ: must Christ then be?
Has He been? Did not we ourselves make Him?
Our mind receives but what it holds, no more.
First of the love, then; we acknowledge Christ —
A proof we comprehend His love, a proof
We had such love already in ourselves,
Knew first what else we should not recognize.
'T is mere projection from man's inmost mind,
And, what he loves, thus falls reflected back,

Becomes accounted somewhat out of him;
He throws it up in air, it drops down earth's,
With shape, name, story added, man's old way.
How prove you Christ came otherwise at least?
Next try the power: He made and rules the world:
Certes there is a world once made, now ruled,
Unless things have been ever as we see.
Our sires declared a charioteer's yoked steeds
Brought the sun up the east and down the west,
Which only of itself now rises, sets,
As if a hand impelled it and a will, —
Thus they long thought, they who had will and hands:
But the new question's whisper is distinct,
Wherefore must all force needs be like ourselves?
We have the hands, the will; what made and drives
The sun is force, is law, is named, not known,
While will and love we do know; marks of these,
Eye-witnesses attest, so books declare —
As that, to punish or reward our race,
The sun at undue times arose or set
Or else stood still: what do not men affirm?
But earth requires as urgently reward
Or punishment to-day as years ago,
And none expects the sun will interpose:
Therefore it was mere passion and mistake,
Or erring zeal for right, which changed the truth.
Go back, far, farther, to the birth of things;
Ever the will, the intelligence, the love,
Man's! — which he gives, supposing he but finds,
As late he gave head, body, hands and feet,
To help these in what forms he called his gods.
First, Jove's brow, Juno's eyes were swept away,
But Jove's wrath, Juno's pride continued long;
As last, will, power, and love discarded these,
So law in turn discards power, love, and will.
What proveth God is otherwise at least?
All else, projection from the mind of man!'

"Nay, do not give me wine, for I am strong,
But place my gospel where I put my hands.

"I say that man was made to grow, not stop;
That help, he needed once, and needs no more,
Having grown but an inch by, is withdrawn:
For he hath new needs, and new helps to these.
This imports solely, man should mount on each

New height in view; the help whereby he mounts,
The ladder-rung his foot has left, may fall,
Since all things suffer change save God the Truth.
Man apprehends Him newly at each stage
Whereat earth's ladder drops, its service done;
And nothing shall prove twice what once was proved.
You stick a garden-plot with ordered twigs
To show inside lie germs of herbs unborn,
And check the careless step would spoil their birth;
But when herbs wave, the guardian twigs may go,
Since should ye doubt of virtues, question kinds,
It is no longer for old twigs ye look,
Which proved once underneath lay store of seed,
But to the herb's self, by what light ye boast,
For what fruit's signs are. This book's fruit is plain,
Nor miracles need prove it any more.
Doth the fruit show? Then miracles bade 'ware
At first of root and stem, saved both till now
From trampling ox, rough boar and wanton goat.
What? Was man made a wheelwork to wind up,
And be discharged, and straight wound up anew?
No! — grown, his growth lasts; taught, he ne'er forgets:
May learn a thousand things, not twice the same.

"This might be pagan teaching: now hear mine.

"I say, that as the babe, you feed awhile,
Becomes a boy and fit to feed himself,
So, minds at first must be spoon-fed with truth:
When they can eat, babe's nurture is withdrawn.
I fed the babe whether it would or no:
I bid the boy or feed himself or starve.
I cried once, 'That ye may believe in Christ,
Behold this blind man shall receive his sight!'
I cry now, 'Urgest thou, *for I am shrewd*
And smile at stories how John's word could cure —
Repeat that miracle and take my faith?'
I say, that miracle was duly wrought
When, save for it, no faith was possible.
Whether a change were wrought i' the shows o' the world,
Whether the change came from our minds which see
Of shows o' the world so much as and no more
Than God wills for His purpose, — (what do I
See now, suppose you, there where you see rock
Round us?) — I know not; such was the effect,
So faith grew, making void more miracles

Because too much: they would compel, not help.
I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it,
And has so far advanced thee to be wise.
Wouldst thou unprove this to re-prove the proved?
In life's mere minute, with power to use that proof,
Leave knowledge and revert to how it sprung?
Thou hast it; use it and forthwith, or die!

"For I say, this is death and the sole death,
When a man's loss comes to him from his gain,
Darkness from light, from knowledge ignorance,
And lack of love from love made manifest;
A lamp's death when, replete with oil, it chokes;
A stomach's when, surcharged with food, it starves.
With ignorance was surety of a cure.
When man, appalled at nature, questioned first,
'What if there lurk a might behind this might?'
He needed satisfaction God could give,
And did give, as ye have the written word:
But when he finds might still redouble might,
Yet asks, 'Since all is might, what use of will?'
— Will, the one source of might, — he being man
With a man's will and a man's might, to teach
In little how the two combine in large, —
That man has turned round on himself and stands,
Which in the course of nature is, to die.

"And when man questioned, 'What if there be love
Behind the will and might, as real as they?' —
He needed satisfaction God could give,
And did give, as ye have the written word:
But when, beholding that love everywhere,
He reasons, 'Since such love is everywhere,
And since ourselves can love and would be loved,
We ourselves make the love, and Christ was not,' —
How shall ye help this man who knows himself,
That he must love and would be loved again,
Yet, owning his own love that proveth Christ,
Rejecteth Christ through very need of Him?
The lamp o'erswims with oil, the stomach flags
Loaded with nurture, and that man's soul dies.

"If he rejoin, 'But this was all the while
A trick; the fault was, first of all, in thee,

Thy story of the places, names and dates,
Where, when and how the ultimate truth had rise,
— Thy prior truth, at last discovered none,
Whence now the second suffers detriment.
What good of giving knowledge if, because
O' the manner of the gift, its profit fail?
And why refuse what modicum of help
Had stopped the after-doubt, impossible
I' the face of truth — truth absolute, uniform?
Why must I hit of this and miss of that,
Distinguish just as I be weak or strong,
And not ask of thee and have answer prompt,
Was this once, was it not once? — then and now
And evermore, plain truth from man to man.
Is John's procedure just the heathen bard's?
Put question of his famous play again
How for the ephemerals' sake, Jove's fire was filched,
And carried in a cane and brought to earth:
The fact is in the fable, cry the wise,
Mortals obtained the boon, so much is fact,
Though fire be spirit and produced on earth.
As with the Titan's, so now with thy tale:
Why breed in us perplexity, mistake,
Nor tell the whole truth in the proper words?'

"I answer, Have ye yet to argue out
The very primal thesis, plainest law,
— Man is not God but hath God's end to serve,
A master to obey, a course to take,
Somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become?
Grant this, then man must pass from old to new,
From vain to real, from mistake to fact,
From what once seemed good, to what now proves best.
How could man have progression otherwise?
Before the point was mooted 'What is God?'
No savage man inquired 'What am myself?'
Much less replied, 'First, last, and best of things.'
Man takes that title now if he believes
Might can exist with neither will nor love,
In God's case — what he names now Nature's Law —
While in himself he recognizes love
No less than might and will: and rightly takes.
Since if man prove the sole existent thing
Where these combine, whatever their degree,
However weak the might or will or love,
So they be found there, put in evidence, —

He is as surely higher in the scale
Than any might with neither love nor will,
As life, apparent in the poorest midge,
(When the faint dust-speck flits, ye guess its wing,)
Is marvellous beyond dead Atlas' self —
Given to the nobler midge for resting-place!
Thus, man proves best and highest — God, in fine,
And thus the victory leads but to defeat,
The gain to loss, best rise to the worst fall,
His life becomes impossible, which is death.

"But if, appealing thence, he cower, avouch
He is mere man, and in humility
Neither may know God nor mistake himself;
I point to the immediate consequence
And say, by such confession straight he falls
Into man's place, a thing nor God nor beast,
Made to know that he can know and not more:
Lower than God who knows all and can all,
Higher than beasts which know and can so far
As each beast's limit, perfect to an end,
Nor conscious that they know, nor craving more;
While man knows partly but conceives beside,
Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact,
And in this striving, this converting air
Into a solid he may grasp and use,
Finds progress, man's distinctive mark alone,
Not God's, and not the beasts': God is, they are,
Man partly is and wholly hopes to be.
Such progress could no more attend his soul
Were all it struggles after found at first
And guesses changed to knowledge absolute,
Than motion wait his body, were all else
Than it the solid earth on every side,
Where now through space he moves from rest to rest.
Man, therefore, thus conditioned, must expect
He could not, what he knows now, know at first;
What he considers that he knows to-day,
Come but to-morrow, he will find misknown;
Getting increase of knowledge, since he learns
Because he lives, which is to be a man,
Set to instruct himself by his past self:
First, like the brute, obliged by facts to learn,
Next, as man may, obliged by his own mind,
Bent, habit, nature, knowledge turned to law.
God's gift was that man should conceive of truth

And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake,
As midway help till he reach fact indeed.
The statuary ere he mould a shape
Boasts a like gift, the shape's idea, and next
The aspiration to produce the same;
So, taking clay, he calls his shape thereout,
Cries ever 'Now I have the thing I see:'
Yet all the while goes changing what was wrought,
From falsehood like the truth, to truth itself.
How were it had he cried, 'I see no face,
No breast, no feet i' the ineffectual clay'?
Rather commend him that he clapped his hands,
And laughed 'It is my shape and lives again!'
Enjoyed the falsehood, touched it on to truth,
Until yourselves applaud the flesh indeed
In what is still flesh-imitating clay.
Right in you, right in him, such way be man's!
God only makes the live shape at a jet.
Will ye renounce this pact of creatureship?
The pattern on the Mount subsists no more,
Seemed awhile, then returned to nothingness;
But copies, Moses strove to make thereby,
Serve still and are replaced as time requires:
By these, make newest vessels, reach the type!
If ye demur, this judgment on your head,
Never to reach the ultimate, angels' law,
Indulging every instinct of the soul
There where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing!

"Such is the burden of the latest time.
I have survived to hear it with my ears,
Answer it with my lips: does this suffice?
For if there be a further woe than such,
Wherein my brothers struggling need a hand,
So long as any pulse is left in mine,
May I be absent even longer yet,
Plucking the blind ones back from the abyss,
Though I should tarry a new hundred years!"

But he was dead: 't was about noon, the day
Somewhat declining: we five buried him
That eve, and then, dividing, went five ways,
And I, disguised, returned to Ephesus.

By this, the cave's mouth must be filled with sand.
Valens is lost, I know not of his trace;

The Bactrian was but a wild childish man,
And could not write nor speak, but only loved:
So, lest the memory of this go quite,
Seeing that I to-morrow fight the beasts,
I tell the same to Phœbas, whom believe!
For many look again to find that face,
Beloved John's to whom I ministered,
Somewhere in life about the world; they err:
Either mistaking what was darkly spoke
At ending of his book, as he relates,
Or misconceiving somewhat of this speech
Scattered from mouth to mouth, as I suppose.
Believe ye will not see him any more
About the world with his divine regard!
For all was as I say, and now the man
Lies as he lay once, breast to breast with God.

[Cerinthus read and mused; one added this:

"If Christ, as thou affirmest, be of men
Mere man, the first and best but nothing more,—
Account Him, for reward of what He was,
Now and forever, wretchedest of all.
For see; Himself conceived of life as love,
Conceived of love as what must enter in,
Fill up, make one with His each soul He loved:
Thus much for man's joy, all men's joy for Him.
Well, He is gone, thou sayest, to fit reward.
But by this time are many souls set free,
And very many still retained alive:
Nay, should His coming be delayed awhile,
Say, ten years longer (twelve years, some compute),
See if, for every finger of thy hands,
There be not found, that day the world shall end,
Hundreds of souls, each holding by Christ's word
That He will grow incorporate with all,
With me as Pamphylax, with him as John,
Groom for each bride! Can a mere man do this?
Yet Christ saith, this He lived and died to do.
Call Christ, then, the illimitable God,
Or lost!"

But 't was Cerinthus that is lost.]

CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS;

OR,

NATURAL THEOLOGY IN THE ISLAND.

"Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself."

['Will sprawl, now that the heat of day is best,
Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire,
With elbows wide, fists clenched to prop his chin.
And, while he kicks both feet in the cool slush,
And feels about his spine small eft-things course,
Run in and out each arm, and make him laugh:
And while above his head a pompion-plant,
Coating the cave-top as a brow its eye,
Creeps down to touch and tickle hair and beard,
And now a flower drops with a bee inside,
And now a fruit to snap at, catch and crunch,—
He looks out o'er yon sea which sunbeams cross
And recross till they weave a spider-web,
(Meshes of fire, some great fish breaks at times,)
And talks to his own self, howe'er he please,
Touching that other, whom his dam called God.
Because to talk about Him, vexes — ha,
Could He but know! and time to vex is now,
When talk is safer than in winter-time.
Moreover Prosper and Miranda sleep
In confidence he drudges at their task,
And it is good to cheat the pair, and gibe,
Letting the rank tongue blossom into speech.]

Setebos, Setebos, and Setebos!
'Thinketh, He dwelleth i' the cold o' the moon.

'Thinketh He made it, with the sun to match,
But not the stars; the stars came otherwise;
Only made clouds, winds, meteors, such as that:
Also this isle, what lives and grows thereon,
And snaky sea which rounds and ends the same.

'Thinketh, it came of being ill at ease:
He hated that He cannot change His cold,
Nor cure its ache. 'Hath spied an icy fish
That longed to 'scape the rock-stream where she lived,
And thaw herself within the lukewarm brine
O' the lazy sea her stream thrusts far amid,

A crystal spike 'twixt two warm walls of wave;
Only, she ever sickened, found repulse
At the other kind of water, not her life,
(Green-dense and dim-delicious, bred o' the sun,)
Flounced back from bliss she was not born to breathe,
And in her old bounds buried her despair,
Hating and loving warmth alike: so He.

'Thinketh, He made thereat the sun, this isle,
Trees and the fowls here, beast and creeping thing.
Yon otter, sleek-wet, black, lithe as a leech;
Yon auk, one fire-eye in a ball of foam,
That floats and feeds; a certain badger brown
He hath watched hunt with that slant white-wedge eye
By moonlight; and the pie with the long tongue
That pricks deep into oakwarts for a worm,
And says a plain word when she finds her prize,
But will not eat the ants; the ants themselves
That build a wall of seeds and settled stalks
About their hole — He made all these and more,
Made all we see, and us, in spite: how else?
He could not, Himself, make a second self
To be His mate; as well have made Himself:
He would not make what He mislikes or slights,
An eyesore to Him, or not worth His pains:
But did, in envy, listlessness or sport,
Make what Himself would fain, in a manner, be —
Weaker in most points, stronger in a few,
Worthy, and yet mere playthings all the while,
Things He admires and mocks too, — that is it.
Because, so brave, so better though they be,
It nothing skills if He begin to plague.
Look now, I melt a gourd-fruit into mash,
Add honeycomb and pods, I have perceived,
Which bite like finches when they bill and kiss, —
Then, when froth rises bladdery, drink up all,
Quick, quick, till maggots scamper through my brain;
Last, throw me on my back i' the seeded thyme,
And wanton, wishing I were born a bird.
Put case, unable to be what I wish,
I yet could make a live bird out of clay:
Would not I take clay, pinch my Caliban
Able to fly? — for, there, see, he hath wings,
And great comb like the hoopoe's to admire,
And there, a sting to do his foes offence,
There, and I will that he begin to live,

Fly to yon rock-top, nip me off the horns
Of grigs high up that make the merry din,
Saucy through their veined wings, and mind me not.
In which feat, if his leg snapped, brittle clay,
And he lay stupid-like, — why, I should laugh;
And if he, spying me, should fall to weep,
Beseech me to be good, repair his wrong,
Bid his poor leg smart less or grow again, —
Well, as the chance were, this might take or else
Not take my fancy: I might hear his cry,
And give the manikin three sound legs for one,
Or pluck the other off, leave him like an egg,
And lessoned he was mine and merely clay.
Were this no pleasure, lying in the thyme,
Drinking the mash, with brain become alive,
Making and marring clay at will? So He.

'Thinketh, such shows nor right nor wrong in Him,
Nor kind, nor cruel: He is strong and Lord.
'Am strong myself compared to yonder crabs
That march now from the mountain to the sea;
'Let twenty pass, and stone the twenty-first,
Loving not, hating not, just choosing so.
'Say, the first straggler that boasts purple spots
Shall join the file, one pincer twisted off;
'Say, this bruised fellow shall receive a worm,
And two worms he whose nippers end in red;
As it likes me each time, I do: so He.

Well then, 'supposeth He is good i' the main,
Placable if His mind and ways were guessed,
But rougher than His handiwork, be sure!
Oh, He hath made things worthier than Himself,
And envieth that, so helped, such things do more
Than He who made them! What consoles but this?
That they, unless through Him, do nought at all,
And must submit: what other use in things?
'Hath cut a pipe of pithless elder-joint
That, blown through, gives exact the scream o' the jay
When from her wing you twitch the feathers blue:
Sound this, and little birds that hate the jay
Flock within stone's throw, glad their foe is hurt:
Put case such pipe could prattle and boast forsooth,
"I catch the birds, I am the crafty thing,
I make the cry my maker cannot make
With his great round mouth; he must blow through mine!"
Would not I smash it with my foot? So He.

But wherefore rough, why cold and ill at ease?
Aha, that is a question! Ask, for that,
What knows, — the something over Setebos
That made Him, or He, may be, found and fought,
Worsted, drove off and did to nothing, perchance.
There may be something quiet o'er His head,
Out of His reach, that feels nor joy nor grief,
Since both derive from weakness in some way.
I joy because the quails come; would not joy
Could I bring quails here when I have a mind:
This Quiet, all it hath a mind to, doth.
'Esteemeth stars the outposts of its couch,
But never spends much thought nor care that way.
It may look up, work up, — the worse for those
It works on! 'Careth but for Setebos
The many-handed as a cuttle-fish,
Who, making Himself feared through what He does,
Looks up, first, and perceives he cannot soar
To what is quiet and hath happy life;
Next looks down here, and out of very spite
Makes this a bauble-world to ape yon real,
These good things to match those as hips do grapes.
'T is solace making baubles, ay, and sport.
Himself peeped late, eyed Prosper at his books
Careless and lofty, lord now of the isle:
Vexed, 'stitched a book of broad leaves, arrow-shaped,
Wrote thereon, he knows what, prodigious words;
Has peeled a wand and called it by a name;
Weareth at whiles for an enchanter's robe
The eyed skin of a supple oncelot;
And hath an ounce sleeker than youngling mole,
A four-legged serpent he makes cower and couch,
Now snarl, now hold its breath and mind his eye,
And saith she is Miranda and my wife:
'Keeps for his Ariel a tall pouch-bill crane
He bids go wade for fish and straight disgorge;
Also a sea-beast, lumpish, which he snared,
Blinded the eyes of, and brought somewhat tame,
And split its toe-webs, and now pens the drudge
In a hole o' the rock and calls him Caliban;
A bitter heart that bides its time and bites.
'Plays thus at being Prosper in a way,
Taketh his mirth with make-believes: so He.

His dam held that the Quiet made all things
Which Setebos vexed only: 'holds not so.

Who made them weak, meant weakness He might vex.
Had He meant other, while His hand was in,
Why not make horny eyes no thorn could prick,
Or plate my scalp with bone against the snow,
Or overscale my flesh 'neath joint and joint,
Like an orc's armor? Ay, — so spoil His sport!
He is the One now: only He doth all.

'Saith, He may like, perchance, what profits Him.
Ay, himself loves what does him good; but why?
'Gets good no otherwise. This blinded beast
Loves whoso places flesh-meat on his nose,
But, had he eyes, would want no help, but hate
Or love, just as it liked him: He hath eyes.
Also it pleaseth Setebos to work,
Use all His hands, and exercise much craft,
By no means for the love of what is worked.
'Tasteth, himself, no finer good i' the world
When all goes right, in this safe summer-time,
And he wants little, hungers, aches not much,
Than trying what to do with wit and strength.
'Falls to make something: 'piled yon pile of turfs,
And squared and stuck there squares of soft white chalk,
And, with a fish-tooth, scratched a moon on each,
And set up endwise certain spikes of tree,
And crowned the whole with a sloth's skull a-top,
Found dead i' the woods, too hard for one to kill.
No use at all i' the work, for work's sole sake;
'Shall some day knock it down again: so He.

'Saith He is terrible: watch His feats in proof!
One hurricane will spoil six good months' hope.
He hath a spite against me, that I know,
Just as He favors Prosper, who knows why?
So it is, all the same, as well I find.
'Wove wattles half the winter, fenced them firm
With stone and stake to stop she-tortoises
Crawling to lay their eggs here: well, one wave,
Feeling the foot of Him upon its neck,
Gaped as a snake does, lolled out its large tongue,
And licked the whole labor flat: so much for spite.

'Saw a ball flame down late (yonder it lies)
Where, half an hour before, I slept i' the shade:
Often they scatter sparkles: there is force!
'Dug up a newt He may have envied once

And turned to stone, shut up inside a stone.
Please Him and hinder this? — What Prosper does?
Aha, if He would tell me how! Not He!
There is the sport: discover how or die!
All need not die, for of the things o' the isle
Some flee afar, some dive, some run up trees;
Those at His mercy, — why, they please Him most
When . . . when . . . well, never try the same way twice
Repeat what act has pleased, He may grow wroth.
You must not know His ways, and play Him off,
Sure of the issue. 'Doth the like himself:
'Spareth a squirrel that it nothing fears
But steals the nut from underneath my thumb,
And when I threat, bites stoutly in defence:
'Spareth an urchin that contrariwise,
Curls up into a ball, pretending death
For fright at my approach: the two ways please.
But what would move my choler more than this,
That either creature counted on its life
To-morrow and next day and all days to come,
Saying, forsooth, in the inmost of its heart,
"Because he did so yesterday with me,
And otherwise with such another brute,
So must he do henceforth and always." — Ay?
Would teach the reasoning couple what "must" means!
'Doth as he likes, or wherefore Lord? So He.

'Conceiveth all things will continue thus,
And we shall have to live in fear of Him
So long as He lives, keeps His strength: no change,
If He have done His best, make no new world
To please Him more, so leave off watching this, —
If He surprise not even the Quiet's self
Some strange day, — or, suppose, grow into it
As grubs grow butterflies: else, here are we,
And there is He, and nowhere help at all.

'Believeth with the life, the pain shall stop.
His dam held different, that after death
He both plagued enemies and feasted friends:
Idly! He doth His worst in this our life,
Giving just respite lest we die through pain,
Saving last pain for worst, — with which, an end.
Meanwhile, the best way to escape His ire
Is, not to seem too happy. 'Sees, himself,
Yonder two flies, with purple films and pink,

Bask on the pompion-bell above: kills both.
'Sees two black painful beetles roll their ball
On head and tail as if to save their lives:
Moves them the stick away they strive to clear.

Even so, 'would have Him misconceive, suppose
This Caliban strives hard and ails no less,
And always, above all else, envies Him;
Wherefore he mainly dances on dark nights,
Moans in the sun, gets under holes to laugh,
And never speaks his mind save housed as now:
Outside, 'groans, curses. If He caught me here,
O'erheard this speech, and asked "What chucklest at?"
'Would, to appease Him, cut a finger off,
Or of my three kid yearlings burn the best,
Or let the toothsome apples rot on tree,
Or push my tame beast for the orc to taste:
While myself lit a fire, and made a song
And sung it, "*What I hate, be consecrate*
To celebrate Thee and Thy state, no mate
For Thee; what see for envy in poor me?"
Hoping the while, since evils sometimes mend,
Warts rub away and sores are cured with slime,
That some strange day, will either the Quiet catch
And conquer Setebos, or likelier He
Decrepit may doze, doze, as good as die.

[What, what? A curtain o'er the world at once!
Crickets stop hissing; not a bird — or, yes,
There scuds His raven that has told Him all!
It was fool's play, this prattling! Ha! The wind
Shoulders the pillared dust, death's house o' the move,
And fast invading fires begin! White blaze —
A tree's head snaps — and there, there, there, there, there,
His thunder follows! Fool to gibe at Him!
Lo! 'Lieth flat and loveth Setebos!
'Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip,
Will let those quails fly, will not eat this month
One little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape!]

CONFESSIONS.

I.

WHAT is he buzzing in my ears?
"Now that I come to die,
Do I view the world as a vale of tears?"
Ah, reverend sir, not I!

II.

What I viewed there once, what I view again
Where the physic bottles stand
On the table's edge, — is a suburb lane,
With a wall to my bedside hand.

III.

That lane sloped, much as the bottles do,
From a house you could descry
O'er the garden-wall: is the curtain blue
Or green to a healthy eye?

IV.

To mine, it serves for the old June weather
Blue above lane and wall;
And that farthest bottle labelled "Ether"
Is the house o'ertopping all.

V.

At a terrace, somewhere near the stopper,
There watched for me, one June,
A girl: I know, sir, it 's improper,
My poor mind 's out of tune.

VI.

Only, there was a way . . . you crept
Close by the side, to dodge
Eyes in the house, two eyes except:
They styled their house "The Lodge."

VII.

What right had a lounger up their lane?
But, by creeping very close,
With the good wall's help, — their eyes might strain
And stretch themselves to Oes,

VIII.

Yet never catch her and me together,
  As she left the attic, there,
By the rim of the bottle labelled "Ether,"
  And stole from stair to stair,

IX.

And stood by the rose-wreathed gate. Alas,
  We loved, sir — used to meet:
How sad and bad and mad it was —
  But then, how it was sweet!

MAY AND DEATH.

I.

I wish that when you died last May,
  Charles, there had died along with you
Three parts of spring's delightful things;
  Ay, and, for me, the fourth part too.

II.

A foolish thought, and worse, perhaps!
  There must be many a pair of friends
Who, arm in arm, deserve the warm
  Moon-births and the long evening-ends.

III.

So, for their sake, be May still May!
  Let their new time, as mine of old,
Do all it did for me: I bid
  Sweet sights and sounds throng manifold.

IV.

Only, one little sight, one plant,
  Woods have in May, that starts up green
Save a sole streak which, so to speak,
  Is spring's blood, spilt its leaves between, —

V.

That, they might spare; a certain wood
  Might miss the plant; their loss were small:
But I, — whene'er the leaf grows there,
  Its drop comes from my heart, that 's all.

DEAF AND DUMB.

A GROUP BY WOOLNER.

Only the prism's obstruction shows aright
The secret of a sunbeam, breaks its light
Into the jewelled bow from blankest white;
  So may a glory from defect arise:
Only by Deafness may the vexed Love wreak
Its insuppressive sense on brow and cheek,
Only by Dumbness adequately speak
  As favored mouth could never, through the eyes.

PROSPICE.

Fear death? — to feel the fog in my throat,
  The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
  I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
  The post of the foe;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
  Yet the strong man must go:
For the journey is done and the summit attained,
  And the barriers fall,
Though a battle 's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
  The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so — one fight more,
  The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
  And bade me creep past.
No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers
  The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
  Of pain, darkness and cold.
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
  The black minute 's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
  Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
  Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
  And with God be the rest!

EURYDICE TO ORPHEUS.

A PICTURE BY LEIGHTON.

But give them me, the mouth, the eyes, the brow!
Let them once more absorb me! One look now
Will lap me round forever, not to pass
Out of its light, though darkness lie beyond:
Hold me but safe again within the bond
Of one immortal look! All woe that was,
Forgotten, and all terror that may be,
Defied, — no past is mine, no future: look at me!

YOUTH AND ART.

I.

It once might have been, once only:
We lodged in a street together,
You, a sparrow on the housetop lonely,
I, a lone she-bird of his feather.

II.

Your trade was with sticks and clay,
You thumbed, thrust, patted and polished,
Then laughed "They will see some day
Smith made, and Gibson demolished."

III.

My business was song, song, song;
I chirped, cheeped, trilled and twittered,
"Kate Brown 's on the boards ere long,
And Grisi's existence embittered!"

IV.

I earned no more by a warble
Than you by a sketch in plaster;
You wanted a piece of marble,
I needed a music-master.

V.

We studied hard in our styles,
Chipped each at a crust like Hindoos,
For air, looked out on the tiles,
For fun, watched each other's windows.

VI.

You lounged, like a boy of the South,
  Cap and blouse — nay, a bit of beard too;
Or you got it, rubbing your mouth
  With fingers the clay adhered to.

VII.

And I — soon managed to find
  Weak points in the flower-fence facing,
Was forced to put up a blind
  And be safe in my corset-lacing.

VIII.

No harm! It was not my fault
  If you never turned your eye's tail up
As I shook upon E *in alt.*,
  Or ran the chromatic scale up:

IX.

For spring bade the sparrows pair,
  And the boys and girls gave guesses,
And stalls in our street looked rare
  With bulrush and watercresses.

X.

Why did not you pinch a flower
  In a pellet of clay and fling it?
Why did not I put a power
  Of thanks in a look, or sing it?

XI.

I did look, sharp as a lynx,
  (And yet the memory rankles,)
When models arrived, some minx
  Tripped up-stairs, she and her ankles.

XII.

But I think I gave you as good!
  "That foreign fellow, — who can know
How she pays, in a playful mood,
  For his tuning her that piano?"

XIII.

Could you say so, and never say,
  "Suppose we join hands and fortunes,

And I fetch her from over the way,
  Her, piano, and long tunes and short tunes"?

XIV.

No, no: you would not be rash,
  Nor I rasher and something over:
You've to settle yet Gibson's hash,
  And Grisi yet lives in clover.

XV.

But you meet the Prince at the Board,
  I'm queen myself at *bals-paré*,
I've married a rich old lord,
  And you're dubbed knight and an R. A.

XVI.

Each life unfulfilled, you see;
  It hangs still, patchy and scrappy:
We have not sighed deep, laughed free,
  Starved, feasted, despaired, — been happy.

XVII.

And nobody calls you a dunce,
  And people suppose me clever:
This could but have happened once,
  And we missed it, lost it forever.

A FACE.

If one could have that little head of hers
Painted upon a background of pale gold,
Such as the Tuscan's early art prefers!
No shade encroaching on the matchless mould
Of those two lips, which should be opening soft
In the pure profile; not as when she laughs,
For that spoils all: but rather as if aloft
Yon hyacinth, she loves so, leaned its staff's
Burden of honey-colored buds to kiss
And capture 'twixt the lips apart for this.
Then her lithe neck, three fingers might surround,
How it should waver on the pale gold ground
Up to the fruit-shaped, perfect chin it lifts!
I know, Correggio loves to mass, in rifts
Of heaven, his angel faces, orb on orb

Breaking its outline, burning shades absorb:
But these are only massed there, I should think,
Waiting to see some wonder momently
Grow out, stand full, fade slow against the sky
(That 's the pale ground you 'd see this sweet face by),
All heaven, meanwhile, condensed into one eye
Which fears to lose the wonder, should it wink.

A LIKENESS.

Some people hang portraits up
In a room where they dine or sup:
And the wife clinks tea-things under,
And her cousin, he stirs his cup,
Asks, "Who was the lady, I wonder?"
"'T is a daub John bought at a sale,"
Quoth the wife, — looks black as thunder.
"What a shade beneath her nose!
Snuff-taking, I suppose," —
Adds the cousin, while John's corns ail.

Or else, there 's no wife in the case,
But the portrait 's queen of the place,
Alone 'mid the other spoils
Of youth, — masks, gloves and foils,
And pipe-sticks, rose, cherry-tree, jasmine,
And the long whip, the tandem-lasher,
And the cast from a fist ("not, alas! mine,
But my master's, the Tipton Slasher"),
And the cards where pistol-balls mark ace,
And a satin shoe used for cigar-case,
And the chamois-horns ("shot in the Chablais"),
And prints — Rarey drumming on Cruiser,
And Sayers, our champion, the bruiser,
And the little edition of Rabelais:
Where a friend, with both hands in his pockets,
May saunter up close to examine it,
And remark a good deal of Jane Lamb in it,
"But the eyes are half out of their sockets;
That hair 's not so bad, where the gloss is,
But they 've made the girl's nose a proboscis:
Jane Lamb, that we danced with at Vichy!
What, is not she Jane? Then, who is she?"

All that I own is a print,
An etching, a mezzotint;
'T is a study, a fancy, a fiction,
Yet a fact (take my conviction)
Because it has more than a hint
Of a certain face, I never
Saw elsewhere touch or trace of
In women I 've seen the face of:
Just an etching, and, so far, clever.

I keep my prints, an imbroglio,
Fifty in one portfolio.
When somebody tries my claret,
We turn round chairs to the fire,
Chirp over days in a garret,
Chuckle o'er increase of salary,
Taste the good fruits of our leisure,
Talk about pencil and lyre,
And the National Portrait Gallery:
Then I exhibit my treasure.
After we 've turned over twenty,
And the debt of wonder my crony owes
Is paid to my Marc Antonios,
He stops me — "*Festina lentè!*
What 's that sweet thing there, the etching?"
How my waistcoat-strings want stretching,
How my cheeks grow red as tomatos,
How my heart leaps! But hearts, after leaps, ache.

"By the by, you must take, for a keepsake,
That other, you praised, of Volpato's."
The fool! would he try a flight further and say —
He never saw, never before to-day,
What was able to take his breath away,
A face to lose youth for, to occupy age
With the dream of, meet death with, — why, I 'll not engage
But that, half in a rapture and half in a rage,
I should toss him the thing's self — "'T is only a duplicate,
A thing of no value! Take it, I supplicate!"

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM."

Now, don't, sir! Don't expose me! Just this once!
This was the first and only time, I 'll swear, —
Look at me, — see, I kneel, — the only time,
I swear, I ever cheated, — yes, by the soul
Of Her who hears — (your sainted mother, sir!)
All, except this last accident, was truth —
This little kind of slip! — and even this,
It was your own wine, sir, the good champagne,
(I took it for Catawba, you 're so kind,)
Which put the folly in my head!

"Get up?"
You still inflict on me that terrible face?
You show no mercy? — Not for Her dear sake,
The sainted spirit's, whose soft breath even now
Blows on my cheek — (don't you feel something, sir?)
You 'll tell?

Go tell, then! Who the devil cares
What such a rowdy chooses to . . .
Aie — aie — aie!
Please, sir! your thumbs are through my windpipe, sir!
Ch—ch!

Well, sir, I hope you 've done it now!
Oh Lord! I little thought, sir, yesterday,
When your departed mother spoke those words
Of peace through me, and moved you, sir, so much,
You gave me — (very kind it was of you)
These shirt-studs — (better take them back again,
Please, sir) — yes, little did I think so soon
A trifle of trick, all through a glass too much
Of his own champagne, would change my best of friends
Into an angry gentleman!

Though, 't was wrong.
I don't contest the point; your anger 's just:
Whatever put such folly in my head,
I know 't was wicked of me. There 's a thick
Dusk undeveloped spirit (I 've observed)
Owes me a grudge — a negro's, I should say,
Or else an Irish emigrant's; yourself
Explained the case so well last Sunday, sir,

When we had summoned Franklin to clear up
A point about those shares i' the telegraph:
Ay, and he swore . . . or might it be Tom Paine?
Thumping the table close by where I crouched,
He 'd do me soon a mischief: that 's come true!
Why, now your face clears! I was sure it would!
Then, this one time . . . don't take your hand away,
Through yours I surely kiss your mother's hand . . .
You 'll promise to forgive me? — or, at least,
Tell nobody of this? Consider, sir!
What harm can mercy do? Would but the shade
Of the venerable dead-one just vouchsafe
A rap or tip! What bit of paper 's here?
Suppose we take a pencil, let her write,
Make the least sign, she urges on her child
Forgiveness? There now! Eh? Oh! 'T was your foot,
And not a natural creak, sir?

Answer, then!
Once, twice, thrice . . . see, I 'm waiting to say "thrice!"
All to no use? No sort of hope for me?
It 's all to post to Greeley's newspaper?

What? If I told you all about the tricks?
Upon my soul! — the whole truth, and nought else,
And how there 's been some falsehood — for your part,
Will you engage to pay my passage out,
And hold your tongue until I 'm safe on board?
England 's the place, not Boston — no offence!
I see what makes you hesitate: don't fear!
I mean to change my trade and cheat no more,
Yes, this time really it 's upon my soul!
Be my salvation! — under Heaven, of course.
I 'll tell some queer things. Sixty Vs must do.
A trifle, though, to start with! We 'll refer
The question to this table?

How you 're changed!
Then split the difference; thirty more, we 'll say.
Ay, but you leave my presents! Else I 'll swear
'T was all through those: you wanted yours again,
So, picked a quarrel with me, to get them back!
Tread on a worm, it turns, sir! If I turn,
Your fault! 'T is you 'll have forced me! Who 's obliged
To give up life yet try no self-defence?
At all events, I 'll run the risk. Eh?

Done!
May I sit, sir? This dear old table, now!
Please, sir, a parting eggnog and cigar!
I 've been so happy with you! Nice stuffed chairs,
And sympathetic sideboards; what an end
To all the instructive evenings! (It 's alight.)
Well, nothing lasts, as Bacon came and said.
Here goes, — but keep your temper, or I 'll scream!

Fol-lol-the-rido-liddle-iddle-ol!
You see, sir, it 's your own fault more than mine;
It 's all your fault, you curious gentlefolk!
You 're prigs, — excuse me, — like to look so spry,
So clever, while you cling by half a claw
To the perch whereon you puff yourselves at roost,
Such piece of self-conceit as serves for perch
Because you chose it, so it must be safe.
Oh, otherwise you 're sharp enough! You spy
Who slips, who slides, who holds by help of wing,
Wanting real foothold, — who can't keep upright
On the other perch, your neighbor chose, not you:
There 's no outwitting you respecting him!
For instance, men love money — that, you know —
And what men do to gain it: well, suppose
A poor lad, say a help's son in your house,
Listening at keyholes, hears the company
Talk grand of dollars, V-notes, and so forth,
How hard they are to get, how good to hold,
How much they buy, — if, suddenly, in pops he —
"*I* 've got a V-note!" — what do you say to him?
What 's your first word which follows your last kick?
"Where did you steal it, rascal?" That 's because
He finds you, fain would fool you, off your perch,
Not on the special piece of nonsense, sir,
Elected your parade-ground: let him try
Lies to the end of the list, — "He picked it up,
His cousin died and left it him by will,
The President flung it to him, riding by,
An actress trucked it for a curl of his hair,
He dreamed of luck and found his shoe enriched,
He dug up clay, and out of clay made gold" —
How would you treat such possibilities?
Would not you, prompt, investigate the case
With cowhide? "Lies, lies, lies," you 'd shout: and why?
Which of the stories might not prove mere truth?
This last, perhaps, that clay was turned to coin!

Let 's see, now, give him me to speak for him!
How many of your rare philosophers,
In plaguy books I 've had to dip into,
Believed gold could be made thus, saw it made,
And made it? Oh, with such philosophers
You 're on your best behavior! While the lad —
With him, in a trice, you settle likelihoods,
Nor doubt a moment how he got his prize:
In his case, you hear, judge and execute,
All in a breath: so would most men of sense.

But let the same lad hear you talk as grand
At the same keyhole, you and company,
Of signs and wonders, the invisible world;
How wisdom scouts our vulgar unbelief
More than our vulgarest credulity;
How good men have desired to see a ghost,
What Johnson used to say, what Wesley did,
Mother Goose thought, and fiddle-diddle-dee: —
If he break in with, "Sir, *I* saw a ghost!"
Ah, the ways change! He finds you perched and prim;
It 's a conceit of yours that ghosts may be:
There 's no talk now of cowhide. "Tell it out!
Don't fear us! Take your time and recollect!
Sit down first: try a glass of wine, my boy!
And, David, (is not that your Christian name?)
Of all things, should this happen twice — it may —
Be sure, while fresh in mind, you let us know!"
Does the boy blunder, blurt out this, blab that,
Break down in the other, as beginners will?
All 's candor, all 's considerateness — "No haste!
Pause and collect yourself! We understand!
That 's the bad memory, or the natural shock,
Or the unexplained *phenomena!*"

Egad,
The boy takes heart of grace; finds, never fear,
The readiest way to ope your own heart wide,
Show — what I call your peacock-perch, pet post
To strut, and spread the tail, and squawk upon!
"Just as you thought, much as you might expect!
There be more things in heaven and earth, Horatio," . . .
And so on. Shall not David take the hint,
Grow bolder, stroke you down at quickened rate?
If he ruffle a feather, it 's, "Gently, patiently!
Manifestations are so weak at first!

Doubting, moreover, kills them, cuts all short,
Cures with a vengeance!"

There, sir, that 's your style
You and your boy — such pains bestowed on him,
Or any headpiece of the average worth,
To teach, say, Greek, would perfect him apace,
Make him a Person ("Porson?" thank you, sir!)
Much more, proficient in the art of lies.
You never leave the lesson! Fire alight,
Catch you permitting it to die! You 've friends;
There 's no withholding knowledge, — least from those
Apt to look elsewhere for their souls' supply:
Why should not you parade your lawful prize?
Who finds a picture, digs a medal up,
Hits on a first edition, — he henceforth
Gives it his name, grows notable: how much more,
Who ferrets out a "medium"? "David 's yours,
You highly-favored man? Then, pity souls
Less privileged! Allow us share your luck!"
So, David holds the circle, rules the roast,
Narrates the vision, peeps in the glass ball,
Sets-to the spirit-writing, hears the raps,
As the case may be.

Now mark! To be precise —
Though I say, "lies" all these, at this first stage,
'T is just for science' sake: I call such grubs
By the name of what they 'll turn to, dragon-flies.
Strictly, it 's what good people style untruth;
But yet, so far, not quite the full-grown thing:
It 's fancying, fable-making, nonsense-work —
What never meant to be so very bad —
The knack of story-telling, brightening up
Each dull old bit of fact that drops its shine.
One does see somewhat when one shuts one's eyes,
If only spots and streaks; tables do tip
In the oddest way of themselves: and pens, good Lord,
Who knows if you drive them or they drive you?
'T is but a foot in the water and out again;
Not that duck-under which decides your dive.
Note this, for it 's important: listen why.

I 'll prove, you push on David till he dives
And ends the shivering. Here 's your circle, now:
Two-thirds of them, with heads like you their host,

Turn up their eyes, and cry, as you expect,
"Lord, who 'd have thought it!" But there 's always one
Looks wise, compassionately smiles, submits,
"Of your veracity no kind of doubt,
But — do you feel so certain of that boy's?
Really, I wonder! I confess myself
More chary of my faith!" That 's galling, sir!
What, he the investigator, he the sage,
When all 's done? Then, you just have shut your eyes,
Opened your mouth, and gulped down David whole,
You! Terrible were such catastrophe!
So, evidence is redoubled, doubled again,
And doubled besides; once more, "He heard, we heard,
You and they heard, your mother and your wife,
Your children and the stranger in your gates:
Did they or did they not?" So much for him,
The black sheep, guest without the wedding-garb,
The doubting Thomas! Now 's your turn to crow:
"He 's kind to think you such a fool: Sludge cheats?
Leave you alone to take precautions!"

Straight
The rest join chorus. Thomas stands abashed,
Sips silent some such beverage as this,
Considers if it be harder, shutting eyes
And gulping David in good fellowship,
Than going elsewhere, getting, in exchange,
With no eggnog to lubricate the food,
Some just as tough a morsel. Over the way,
Holds Captain Sparks his court: is it better there?
Have not you hunting-stories, scalping-scenes,
And Mexican War exploits to swallow plump
If you 'd be free o' the stove-side, rocking-chair,
And trio of affable daughters?

Doubt succumbs!
Victory! All your circle 's yours again!
Out of the clubbing of submissive wits,
David's performance rounds, each chink gets patched,
Every protrusion of a point 's filed fine,
All 's fit to set a-rolling round the world,
And then return to David finally,
Lies seven feet thick about his first half-inch.
Here 's a choice birth o' the supernatural,
Poor David 's pledged to! You 've employed no tool
That laws exclaim at, save the devil's own,

Yet screwed him into henceforth gulling you
To the top o' your bent, — all out of one half-lie!

You hold, if there 's one half or a hundredth part
Of a lie, that 's his fault, — his be the penalty!
I dare say! You 'd prove firmer in his place?
You 'd find the courage, — that first flurry over,
That mild bit of romancing-work at end, —
To interpose with "It gets serious, this;
Must stop here. Sir, I saw no ghost at all.
Inform your friends I made . . . well, fools of them,
And found you ready made. I 've lived in clover
These three weeks: take it out in kicks of me!"
I doubt it. Ask your conscience! Let me know,
Twelve months hence, with how few embellishments
You 've told almighty Boston of this passage
Of arms between us, your first taste o' the foil
From Sludge who could not fence, sir! Sludge, your boy!
I lied, sir, — there! I got up from my gorge
On offal in the gutter, and preferred
Your canvas-backs: I took their carver's size,
Measured his modicum of intelligence,
Tickled him on the cockles of his heart
With a raven feather, and next week found myself
Sweet and clean, dining daintily, dizened smart,
Set on a stool buttressed by ladies' knees,
Every soft smiler calling me her pet,
Encouraging my story to uncoil
And creep out from its hole, inch after inch,
"How last night, I no sooner snug in bed,
Tucked up, just as they left me, — than came raps!
While a light whisked" . . . "Shaped somewhat like a star?"
"Well, like some sort of stars, ma'am." — "So we thought!
And any voice? Not yet? Try hard, next time,
If you can't hear a voice; we think you may:
At least, the Pennsylvanian 'mediums' did."
Oh, next time comes the voice! "Just as we hoped!"
Are not the hopers proud now, pleased, profuse
O' the natural acknowledgment?

Of course!

So, off we push, illy-oh-yo, trim the boat,
On we sweep with a cataract ahead,
We 're midway to the Horse-shoe: stop, who can.
The dance of bubbles gay about our prow!
Experiences become worth waiting for,

Spirits now speak up, tell their inmost mind,
And compliment the "medium" properly,
Concern themselves about his Sunday coat,
See rings on his hand with pleasure. Ask yourself
How you 'd receive a course of treats like these!
Why, take the quietest hack and stall him up,
Cram him with corn a month, then out with him
Among his mates on a bright April morn,
With the turf to tread; see if you find or no
A caper in him, if he bucks or bolts!
Much more a youth whose fancies sprout as rank
As toadstool-clump from melon-bed. 'T is soon,
"Sirrah, you spirit, come, go, fetch and carry,
Read, write, rap, rub-a-dub, and hang yourself!"
I 'm spared all further trouble; all 's arranged;
Your circle does my business; I may rave
Like an epileptic dervish in the books,
Foam, fling myself flat, rend my clothes to shreds;
No matter: lovers, friends and countrymen
Will lay down spiritual laws, read wrong things right
By the rule o' reverse. If Francis Verulam
Styles himself Bacon, spells the name beside
With a *y* and a *k*, says he drew breath in York,
Gave up the ghost in Wales when Cromwell reigned,
(As, sir, we somewhat fear he was apt to say,
Before I found the useful book that knows) —
Why, what harm 's done? The circle smiles apace,
"It was not Bacon, after all, you see!
We understand; the trick 's but natural:
Such spirits' individuality
Is hard to put in evidence: they incline
To gibe and jeer, these undeveloped sorts.
You see, their world 's much like a jail broke loose,
While this of ours remains shut, bolted, barred,
With a single window to it. Sludge, our friend,
Serves as this window, whether thin or thick,
Or stained or stainless; he 's the medium-pane
Through which, to see us and be seen, they peep:
They crowd each other, hustle for a chance,
Tread on their neighbor's kibes, play tricks enough!
Does Bacon, tired of waiting, swerve aside?
Up in his place jumps Barnum — 'I 'm your man,
I 'll answer you for Bacon!' Try once more!"

Or else it 's — "What 's a 'medium'? He 's a means,
Good, bad, indifferent, still the only means

Spirits can speak by; he may misconceive,
Stutter and stammer, — he 's their Sludge and drudge,
Take him or leave him; they must hold their peace,
Or else, put up with having knowledge strained
To half-expression through his ignorance.
Suppose, the spirit Beethoven wants to shed
New music he 's brimful of; why, he turns
The handle of this organ, grinds with Sludge,
And what he poured in at the mouth o' the mill
As a Thirty-third Sonata, (fancy now!)
Comes from the hopper as bran-new Sludge, nought else,
The Shakers' Hymn in G, with a natural F,
Or the 'Stars and Stripes' set to consecutive fourths."

Sir, where 's the scrape you did not help me through,
You that are wise? And for the fools, the folk
Who came to see, — the guests, (observe that word!)
Pray do you find guests criticise your wine,
Your furniture, your grammar, or your nose?
Then, why your "medium"? What 's the difference?
Prove your madeira red-ink and gamboge, —
Your Sludge, a cheat — then, somebody 's a goose
For vaunting both as genuine. "Guests!" Don't fear!
They 'll make a wry face, nor too much of that,
And leave you in your glory.

"No, sometimes
They doubt and say as much!" Ay, doubt they do!
And what 's the consequence? "Of course they doubt" —
(You triumph) — "that explains the hitch at once!
Doubt posed our 'medium,' puddled his pure mind;
He gave them back their rubbish: pitch chaff in,
Could flour come out o' the honest mill?" So, prompt
Applaud the faithful: cases flock in point,
"How, when a mocker willed a 'medium' once
Should name a spirit James whose name was George,
'James,' cried the 'medium,' — 't was the test of truth!"
In short, a hit proves much, a miss proves more.
Does this convince? The better: does it fail?
Time for the double-shotted broadside, then —
The grand means, last resource. Look black and big!
"You style us idiots, therefore — why stop short?
Accomplices in rascality: this we hear
In our own house, from our invited guest
Found brave enough to outrage a poor boy
Exposed by our good faith! Have you been heard?

Now, then, hear us; one man 's not quite worth twelve.
You see a cheat? Here 's some twelve see an ass:
Excuse me if I calculate: good day!"
Out slinks the sceptic, all the laughs explode,
Sludge waves his hat in triumph!

Or — he don't.
There 's something in real truth (explain who can!)
One casts a wistful eye at, like the horse
Who mopes beneath stuffed hay-racks and won't munch
Because he spies a corn-bag: hang that truth,
It spoils all dainties proffered in its place!
I 've felt at times when, cockered, cosseted
And coddled by the aforesaid company,
Bidden enjoy their bullying, — never fear,
But o'er their shoulders spit at the flying man, —
I 've felt a child; only, a fractious child
That, dandled soft by nurse, aunt, grandmother,
Who keep him from the kennel, sun and wind,
Good fun and wholesome mud, — enjoined be sweet,
And comely and superior, — eyes askance
The ragged sons o' the gutter at their game,
Fain would be down with them i' the thick o' the filth,
Making dirt-pies, laughing free, speaking plain,
And calling granny the gray old cat she is.
I 've felt a spite, I say, at you, at them,
Huggings and humbug — gnashed my teeth to mark
A decent dog pass! It 's too bad, I say,
Ruining a soul so!

But what 's "so," what 's fixed,
Where may one stop? Nowhere! The cheating 's nursed
Out of the lying, softly and surely spun
To just your length, sir! I 'd stop soon enough:
But you 're for progress. "All old, nothing new?
Only the usual talking through the mouth,
Or writing by the hand? I own, I thought
This would develop, grow demonstrable,
Make doubt absurd, give figures we might see,
Flowers we might touch. There 's no one doubts you, Sludge!
You dream the dreams, you see the spiritual sights,
The speeches come in your head, beyond dispute.
Still, for the sceptics' sake, to stop all mouths,
We want some outward manifestation! — well,
The Pennsylvanians gained such; why not Sludge?
He may improve with time!"

Ay, that he may!
He sees his lot: there 's no avoiding fate.
'T is a trifle at first. "Eh, David? Did you hear?
You jogged the table, your foot caused the squeak,
This time you 're . . . joking, are you not, my boy?"
"N-n-no!" — and I 'm done for, bought and sold henceforth.
The old good easy jog-trot way, the . . . eh?
The . . . not so very false, as falsehood goes,
The spinning out and drawing fine, you know, —
Really mere novel-writing of a sort,
Acting, or improvising, make-believe,
Surely not downright cheatery, — anyhow,
'T is done with and my lot cast; Cheat 's my name:
The fatal dash of brandy in your tea
Has settled what you 'll have the souchong's smack:
The caddy gives way to the dram-bottle.

Then, it 's so cruel easy! Oh, those tricks
That can't be tricks, those feats by sleight of hand,
Clearly no common conjuror's! — no, indeed!
A conjuror? Choose me any craft i' the world
A man puts hand to; and with six months' pains,
I 'll play you twenty tricks miraculous
To people untaught the trade: have you seen glass blown,
Pipes pierced? Why, just this biscuit that I chip,
Did you ever watch a baker toss one flat
To the oven? Try and do it! Take my word,
Practise but half as much, while limbs are lithe,
To turn, shove, tilt a table, crack your joints,
Manage your feet, dispose your hands aright,
Work wires that twitch the curtains, play the glove
At end o' your slipper, — then put out the lights
And . . . there, there, all you want you 'll get, I hope!
I found it slip, easy as an old shoe.

Now, lights on table again! I 've done my part,
You take my place while I give thanks and rest.
"Well, Judge Humgruffin, what 's your verdict, sir?
You, hardest head in the United States, —
Did you detect a cheat here? Wait! Let 's see!
Just an experiment first, for candor's sake!
I 'll try and cheat you, Judge! The table tilts:
Is it I that move it? Write! I 'll press your hand:
Cry when I push, or guide your pencil, Judge!"
Sludge still triumphant! "That a rap, indeed?
That, the real writing? Very like a whale!
Then, if, sir, you — a most distinguished man,

And, were the Judge not here, I 'd say, . . . no matter!
Well, sir, if you fail, you can't take us in, —
There 's little fear that Sludge will!"

Won't he, ma'am?
But what if our distinguished host, like Sludge,
Bade God bear witness that he played no trick,
While you believed that what produced the raps
Was just a certain child who died, you know,
And whose last breath you thought your lips had felt?
Eh? That 's a capital point, ma'am: Sludge begins
At your entreaty with your dearest dead,
The little voice set lisping once again,
The tiny hand made feel for yours once more,
The poor lost image brought back, plain as dreams,
Which image, if a word had chanced recall,
The customary cloud would cross your eyes,
Your heart return the old tick, pay its pang!
A right mood for investigation, this!
One 's at one's ease with Saul and Jonathan,
Pompey and Cæsar: but one's own lost child . . .
I wonder, when you heard the first clod drop
From the spadeful at the grave-side, felt you free
To investigate who twitched your funeral scarf
Or brushed your flounces? Then, it came of course,
You should be stunned and stupid; then (how else?)
Your breath stopped with your blood, your brain struck work.
But now, such causes fail of such effects,
All 's changed, — the little voice begins afresh,
Yet you, calm, consequent, can test and try
And touch the truth. "Tests? Did n't the creature tell
Its nurse's name, and say it lived six years,
And rode a rocking-horse? Enough of tests!
Sludge never could learn that!"

He could not, eh?
You compliment him. "Could not?" Speak for yourself!
I 'd like to know the man I ever saw
Once, —never mind where, how, why, when, — once saw,
Of whom I do not keep some matter in mind
He 'd swear I "could not" know, sagacious soul!
What? Do you live in this world's blow of blacks,
Palaver, gossipry, a single hour
Nor find one smut has settled on your nose,
Of a smut's worth, no more, no less? — one fact
Out of the drift of facts, whereby you learn

What someone was, somewhere, somewhen, somewhy?
You don't tell folk — "See what has stuck to me!
Judge Humgruffin, our most distinguished man,
Your uncle was a tailor, and your wife
Thought to have married Miggs, missed him, hit you!" —
Do you, sir, though you see him twice a-week?
"No," you reply, "what use retailing it?
Why should I?" But, you see, one day you *should*,
Because one day there 's much use, — when this fact
Brings you the Judge upon both gouty knees
Before the supernatural; proves that Sludge
Knows, as you say, a thing he "could not" know:
Will not Sludge thenceforth keep an outstretched face,
The way the wind drives?

"Could not!" Look you now,
I 'll tell you a story! There 's a whiskered chap,
A foreigner, that teaches music here
And gets his bread, — knowing no better way:
He says, the fellow who informed of him
And made him fly his country and fall West,
Was a hunchback cobbler, sat, stitched soles and sang,
In some outlandish place, the city Rome,
In a cellar by their Broadway, all day long;
Never asked questions, stopped to listen or look,
Nor lifted nose from lapstone; let the world
Roll round his three-legged stool, and news run in
The ears he hardly seemed to keep pricked up.
Well, that man went on Sundays, touched his pay,
And took his praise from government, you see;
For something like two dollars every week,
He 'd engage tell you some one little thing
Of some one man, which led to many more,
(Because one truth leads right to the world's end,)
And make you that man's master — when he dined
And on what dish, where walked to keep his health
And to what street. His trade was, throwing thus
His sense out, like an ant-eater's long tongue,
Soft, innocent, warm, moist, impassible,
And when 't was crusted o'er with creatures — slick,
Their juice enriched his palate. "Could not Sludge!"

I 'll go yet a step further, and maintain,
Once the imposture plunged its proper depth
I' the rotten of your natures, all of you, —
(If one 's not mad nor drunk, and hardly then)

It 's impossible to cheat — that 's, be found out!
Go tell your brotherhood this first slip of mine,
All to-day's tale, how you detected Sludge,
Behaved unpleasantly, till he was fain confess,
And so has come to grief! You 'll find, I think,
Why Sludge still snaps his fingers in your face.
There now, you 've told them! What 's their prompt reply?
"Sir, did that youth confess he had cheated me,
I 'd disbelieve him. He may cheat at times;
That 's in the 'medium'-nature, thus they 're made,
Vain and vindictive, cowards, prone to scratch.
And so all cats are; still, a cat 's the beast
You coax the strange electric sparks from out,
By rubbing back its fur; not so a dog,
Nor lion, nor lamb: 't is the cat's nature, sir!
Why not the dog's? Ask God, who made them beasts!
D' ye think the sound, the nicely-balanced man
(Like me," — aside) — "like you yourself," — (aloud)
"— He 's stuff to make a 'medium'? Bless your soul,
'T is these hysteric, hybrid half-and-halfs,
Equivocal, worthless vermin yield the fire!
We take such as we find them, 'ware their tricks,
Wanting their service. Sir, Sludge took in you —
How, I can't say, not being there to watch:
He was tried, was tempted by your easiness, —
He did not take in me!"

Thank you for Sludge!
I 'm to be grateful to such patrons, eh,
When what you hear 's my best word? 'T is a challenge,
"Snap at all strangers, half-tamed prairie-dog,
So you cower duly at your keeper's beck!
Cat, show what claws were made for, muffling them
Only to me! Cheat others if you can,
Me, if you dare!" And, my wise sir, I dared —
Did cheat you first, made you cheat others next,
And had the help o' your vaunted manliness
To bully the incredulous. You used me?
Have not I used you, taken full revenge,
Persuaded folk they knew not their own name,
And straight they 'd own the error! Who was the fool
When, to an awe-struck wide-eyed open-mouthed
Circle of sages, Sludge would introduce
Milton composing baby-rhymes, and Locke
Reasoning in gibberish, Homer writing Greek
In noughts and crosses, Asaph setting psalms

To crotchet and quaver? I 've made a spirit squeak
In sham voice for a minute, then outbroke
Bold in my own, defying the imbeciles —
Have copied some ghost's pothooks, half a page,
Then ended with my own scrawl undisguised.
"All right! The ghost was merely using Sludge,
Suiting itself from his imperfect stock!"
Don't talk of gratitude to me! For what?
For being treated as a showman's ape,
Encouraged to be wicked and make sport,
Fret or sulk, grin or whimper, any mood
So long as the ape be in it and no man —
Because a nut pays every mood alike.
Curse your superior, superintending sort,
Who, since you hate smoke, send up boys that climb
To cure your chimney, bid a "medium" lie
To sweep you truth down! Curse your women too,
Your insolent wives and daughters, that fire up
Or faint away if a male hand squeeze theirs,
Yet, to encourage Sludge, may play with Sludge
As only a "medium," only the kind of thing
They must humor, fondle . . . oh, to misconceive
Were too preposterous! But I 've paid them out!
They 've had their wish — called for the naked truth,
And in she tripped, sat down and bade them stare:
They had to blush a little and forgive!
"The fact is, children talk so; in next world
All our conventions are reversed, — perhaps
Made light of: something like old prints, my dear!
The Judge has one, he brought from Italy,
A metropolis in the background, — o'er a bridge,
A team of trotting roadsters, — cheerful groups
Of wayside travellers, peasants at their work,
And, full in front, quite unconcerned, why not?
Three nymphs conversing with a cavalier,
And never a rag among them: 'fine,' folk cry —
And heavenly manners seem not much unlike!
Let Sludge go on; we 'll fancy it 's in print!"
If such as came for wool, sir, went home shorn,
Where is the wrong I did them? 'T was their choice;
They tried the adventure, ran the risk, tossed up
And lost, as some one 's sure to do in games;
They fancied I was made to lose, — smoked glass
Useful to spy the sun through, spare their eyes:
And had I proved a red-hot iron plate
They thought to pierce, and, for their pains, grew blind,

Whose were the fault but theirs? While, as things go,
Their loss amounts to gain, the more 's the shame!
They 've had their peep into the spirit-world,
And all this world may know it! They 've fed fat
Their self-conceit which else had starved: what chance
Save this, of cackling o'er a golden egg
And compassing distinction from the flock,
Friends of a feather? Well, they paid for it,
And not prodigiously; the price o' the play,
Not counting certain pleasant interludes,
Was scarce a vulgar play's worth. When you buy
The actor's talent, do you dare propose
For his soul beside? Whereas, my soul you buy!
Sludge acts Macbeth, obliged to be Macbeth,
Or you 'll not hear his first word! Just go through
That slight formality, swear himself 's the Thane,
And thenceforth he may strut and fret his hour,
Spout, spawl, or spin his target, no one cares!
Why had n't I leave to play tricks, Sludge as Sludge?
Enough of it all! I 've wiped out scores with you —
Vented your fustian, let myself be streaked
Like tom-fool with your ochre and carmine,
Worn patchwork your respectable fingers sewed
To metamorphose somebody, — yes, I 've earned
My wages, swallowed down my bread of shame,
And shake the crumbs off — where but in your face?

As for religion — why, I served it, sir!
I 'll stick to that! With my *phenomena*
I laid the atheist sprawling on his back,
Propped up Saint Paul, or, at least, Swedenborg!
In fact, it 's just the proper way to balk
These troublesome fellows — liars, one and all,
Are not these sceptics? Well, to baffle them,
No use in being squeamish: lie yourself!
Erect your buttress just as wide o' the line,
Your side, as they build up the wall on theirs;
Where both meet, midway in a point, is truth,
High overhead: so, take your room, pile bricks,
Lie! Oh, there 's titillation in all shame!
What snow may lose in white, snow gains in rose!
Miss Stokes turns — Rahab, — nor a bad exchange!
Glory be on her, for the good she wrought,
Breeding belief anew 'neath ribs of death,
Browbeating now the unabashed before,
Ridding us of their whole life's gathered straws

By a live coal from the altar! Why, of old,
Great men spent years and years in writing books
To prove we 've souls, and hardly proved it then:
Miss Stokes with her live coal, for you and me!
Surely, to this good issue, all was fair —
Not only fondling Sludge, but, even suppose
He let escape some spice of knavery, — well,
In wisely being blind to it! Don't you praise
Nelson for setting spy-glass to blind eye
And saying . . . what was it — that he could not see
The signal he was bothered with? Ay, indeed!

I 'll go beyond: there 's a real love of a lie,
Liars find ready-made for lies they make,
As hand for glove, or tongue for sugar-plum.
At best, 't is never pure and full belief;
Those furthest in the quagmire, — don't suppose
They strayed there with no warning, got no chance
Of a filth-speck in their face, which they clenched teeth,
Bent brow against! Be sure they had their doubts,
And fears, and fairest challenges to try
The floor o' the seeming solid sand! But no!
Their faith was pledged, acquaintance too apprised,
All but the last step ventured, kerchiefs waved,
And Sludge called "pet:" 't was easier marching on
To the promised land; join those who, Thursday next,
Meant to meet Shakespeare; better follow Sludge —
Prudent, oh sure! — on the alert, how else?
But making for the mid-bog, all the same!
To hear your outcries, one would think I caught
Miss Stokes by the scruff o' the neck, and pitched her flat,
Foolish-face-foremost! Hear these simpletons,
That 's all I beg, before my work 's begun,
Before I 've touched them with my finger-tip!
Thus they await me (do but listen, now!
It 's reasoning, this is, — I can't imitate
The baby voice, though), — "In so many tales
Must be some truth, truth though a pin-point big,
Yet, some: a single man 's deceived, perhaps —
Hardly, a thousand: to suppose one cheat
Can gull all these, were more miraculous far
Than aught we should confess a miracle," —
And so on. Then the Judge sums up — (it 's rare)
Bids you respect the authorities that leap
To the judgment-seat at once, — why don't you note
The limpid nature, the unblemished life,

The spotless honor, indisputable sense
Of the first upstart with his story? What —
Outrage a boy on whom you ne'er till now
Set eyes, because he finds raps trouble him?

Fools, these are: ay, and how of their opposites
Who never did, at bottom of their hearts,
Believe for a moment? — Men emasculate,
Blank of belief, who played, as eunuchs use,
With superstition safely, — cold of blood,
Who saw what made for them i' the mystery,
Took their occasion, and supported Sludge
— As proselytes? No, thank you, far too shrewd!
— But promisers of fair play, encouragers
O' the claimant; who in candor needs must hoist
Sludge up on Mars' Hill, get speech out of Sludge
To carry off, criticise, and cant about!
Did n't Athens treat Saint Paul so? — at any rate,
It 's "a new thing," philosophy fumbles at.
Then there 's the other picker-out of pearl
From dungheaps, — ay, your literary man,
Who draws on his kid gloves to deal with Sludge
Daintily and discreetly, — shakes a dust
O' the doctrine, flavors thence, he well knows how,
The narrative or the novel, — half-believes,
All for the book's sake, and the public's stare,
And the cash that 's God's sole solid in this world!
Look at him! Try to be too bold, too gross
For the master! Not you! He 's the man for muck;
Shovel it forth, full-splash, he 'll smooth your brown
Into artistic richness, never fear!
Find him the crude stuff; when you recognize
Your lie again, you 'll doff your hat to it,
Dressed out for company! "For company,"
I say, since there 's the relish of success:
Let all pay due respect, call the lie truth,
Save the soft silent smirking gentleman
Who ushered in the stranger: you must sigh
"How melancholy, he, the only one,
Fails to perceive the bearing of the truth
Himself gave birth to!" — There 's the triumph's smack!
That man would choose to see the whole world roll
I' the slime o' the slough, so he might touch the tip
Of his brush with what I call the best of browns —
Tint ghost-tales, spirit-stories, past the power
Of the outworn umber and bistre!

Yet I think
There 's a more hateful form of foolery —
The social sage's, Solomon of saloons
And philosophic diner-out, the fribble
Who wants a doctrine for a chopping-block
To try the edge of his faculty upon,
Prove how much common sense he 'll hack and hew
I' the critical minute 'twixt the soup and fish!
These were my patrons: these, and the like of them
Who, rising in my soul now, sicken it, —
These I have injured! Gratitude to these?
The gratitude, forsooth, of a prostitute
To the greenhorn and the bully — friends of hers,
From the wag that wants the queer jokes for his club,
To the snuffbox-decorator, honest man,
Who just was at his wits' end where to find
So genial a Pasiphae! All and each
Pay, compliment, protect from the police:
And how she hates them for their pains, like me!
So much for my remorse at thanklessness
Toward a deserving public!

But, for God?
Ay, that 's a question! Well, sir, since you press —
(How you do tease the whole thing out of me!
I don't mean you, you know, when I say "them:"
Hate you, indeed! But that Miss Stokes, that Judge!
Enough, enough — with sugar: thank you, sir!)
Now for it, then! Will you believe me, though?
You 've heard what I confess; I don't unsay
A single word: I cheated when I could,
Rapped with my toe-joints, set sham hands at work,
Wrote down names weak in sympathetic ink,
Rubbed odic lights with ends of phosphor-match,
And all the rest; believe that: believe this,
By the same token, though it seem to set
The crooked straight again, unsay the said,
Stick up what I 've knocked down; I can't help that
It 's truth! I somehow vomit truth to-day.
This trade of mine — I don't know, can't be sure
But there was something in it, tricks and all!
Really, I want to light up my own mind.
They were tricks, — true, but what I mean to add
Is also true. First, — don't it strike you, sir?
Go back to the beginning, — the first fact
We 're taught is, there 's a world beside this world,
With spirits, not mankind, for tenantry;

That much within that world once sojourned here,
That all upon this world will visit there,
And therefore that we, bodily here below,
Must have exactly such an interest
In learning what may be the ways o' the world
Above us, as the disembodied folk
Have (by all analogic likelihood)
In watching how things go in the old home
With us, their sons, successors, and what not.
Oh, yes, with added powers probably,
Fit for the novel state, — old loves grown pure,
Old interests understood aright, — they watch!
Eyes to see, ears to hear, and hands to help,
Proportionate to advancement: they 're ahead,
That 's all — do what we do, but noblier done —
Use plate, whereas we eat our meals off delf,
(To use a figure.)

Concede that, and I ask
Next what may be the mode of intercourse
Between us men here, and those once-men there?
First comes the Bible's speech; then, history
With the supernatural element, — you know —
All that we sucked in with our mothers' milk,
Grew up with, got inside of us at last,
Till it 's found bone of bone and flesh of flesh.
See now, we start with the miraculous,
And know it used to be, at all events:
What 's the first step we take, and can't but take,
In arguing from the known to the obscure?
Why this: "What was before, may be to-day.
Since Samuel's ghost appeared to Saul, — of course
My brother's spirit may appear to me."
Go tell your teacher that! What 's his reply?
What brings a shade of doubt for the first time
O'er his brow late so luminous with faith?
"Such things have been," says he, "and there 's no doubt
Such things may be: but I advise mistrust
Of eyes, ears, stomach, and, more than all, your brain,
Unless it be of your great-grandmother,
Whenever they propose a ghost to you!"
The end is, there 's a composition struck;
'T is settled, we 've some way of intercourse
Just as in Saul's time; only, different:
How, when and where, precisely, — find it out!
I want to know, then, what 's so natural

As that a person born into this world
And seized on by such teaching, should begin
With firm expectancy and a frank look-out
For his own allotment, his especial share
I' the secret, — his particular ghost, in fine ?
I mean, a person born to look that way,
Since natures differ : take the painter-sort,
One man lives fifty years in ignorance
Whether grass be green or red, — "No kind of eye
For color," say you ; while another picks
And puts away even pebbles, when a child,
Because of bluish spots and pinky veins —
"Give him forthwith a paint-box!" Just the same
Was I born . . . "medium," you won't let me say, —
Well, seer of the supernatural
Everywhen, everyhow, and everywhere, —
Will that do?

I and all such boys of course
Started with the same stock of Bible-truth ;
Only, — what in the rest you style their sense,
Instinct, blind reasoning but imperative,
This, betimes, taught them the old world had one law
And ours another : "New world, new laws," cried they :
"None but old laws, seen everywhere at work,"
Cried I, and by their help explained my life
The Jews' way, still a working way to me.
Ghosts made the noises, fairies waved the lights,
Or Santaclaus slid down on New Year's Eve
And stuffed with cakes the stocking at my bed,
Changed the worn shoes, rubbed clean the fingered slate
O' the sum that came to grief the day before.

This could not last long: soon enough I found
Who had worked wonders thus, and to what end :
But did I find all easy, like my mates?
Henceforth no supernatural any more?
Not a whit: what projects the billiard-balls?
"A cue," you answer. "Yes, a cue," said I;
"But what hand, off the cushion, moved the cue?
What unseen agency, outside the world,
Prompted its puppets to do this and that,
Put cakes and shoes and slates into their mind,
These mothers and aunts, nay even schoolmasters?"
Thus high I sprang, and there have settled since.
Just so I reason, in sober earnest still,

About the greater godsends, what you call
The serious gains and losses of my life.
What do I know or care about your world
Which either is or seems to be? This snap
O' my fingers, sir! My care is for myself;
Myself am whole and sole reality
Inside a raree-show and a market-mob
Gathered about it: that 's the use of things.
'T is easy saying they serve vast purposes,
Advantage their grand selves: be it true or false,
Each thing may have two uses. What 's a star?
A world, or a world's sun: does n't it serve
As taper also, timepiece, weather-glass,
And almanac? Are stars not set for signs
When we should shear our sheep, sow corn, prune trees?
The Bible says so.

Well, I add one use
To all the acknowledged uses, and declare
If I spy Charles's Wain at twelve to-night,
It warns me, "Go, nor lose another day,
And have your hair cut, Sludge!" You laugh: and why?
Were such a sign too hard for God to give?
No: but Sludge seems too little for such grace:
Thank you, sir! So you think, so does not Sludge!
When you and good men gape at Providence,
Go into history and bid us mark
Not merely powder-plots prevented, crowns
Kept on kings' heads by miracle enough,
But private mercies — oh, you 've told me, sir,
Of such interpositions! How yourself
Once, missing on a memorable day
Your handkerchief — just setting out, you know, —
You must return to fetch it, lost the train,
And saved your precious self from what befell
The thirty-three whom Providence forgot.
You tell, and ask me what I think of this?
Well, sir, I think then, since you needs must know,
What matter had you and Boston city to boot
Sailed skyward, like burnt onion-peelings? Much
To you, no doubt: for me — undoubtedly
The cutting of my hair concerns me more,
Because, however sad the truth may seem,
Sludge is of all-importance to himself.
You set apart that day in every year
For special thanksgiving, were a heathen else:

Well, I who cannot boast the like escape,
Suppose I said, "I don't thank Providence
For my part, owing it no gratitude"?
"Nay, but you owe as much,"— you'd tutor me,
"You, every man alive, for blessings gained
In every hour o' the day, could you but know!
I saw my crowning mercy: all have such,
Could they but see!" Well, sir, why don't they see?
"Because they won't look,— or, perhaps, they can't."
Then, sir, suppose I can, and will, and do
Look, microscopically as is right,
Into each hour with its infinitude
Of influences at work to profit Sludge?
For that's the case: I've sharpened up my sight
To spy a providence in the fire's going out,
The kettle's boiling, the dime's sticking fast
Despite the hole i' the pocket. Call such facts
Fancies, too petty a work for Providence,
And those same thanks which you exact from me
Prove too prodigious payment: thanks for what,
If nothing guards and guides us little men?
No, no, sir! You must put away your pride,
Resolve to let Sludge into partnership!
I live by signs and omens: looked at the roof
Where the pigeons settle—"If the further bird,
The white, takes wing first, I'll confess when thrashed;
Not, if the blue does,"—so I said to myself
Last week, lest you should take me by surprise:
Off flapped the white,—and I'm confessing, sir!
Perhaps 't is Providence's whim and way
With only me, i' the world: how can you tell?
"Because unlikely!" Was it likelier, now,
That this our one out of all worlds beside,
The what-d'you-call-'em millions, should be just
Precisely chosen to make Adam for,
And the rest o' the tale? Yet the tale's true, you know
Such undeserving clod was graced so once;
Why not graced likewise undeserving Sludge?
Are we merit-mongers, flaunt we filthy rags?
All you can bring against my privilege
Is, that another way was taken with you,—
Which I don't question. It's pure grace, my luck:
I'm broken to the way of nods and winks,
And need no formal summoning. You've a help;
Holloa his name or whistle, clap your hands,
Stamp with your foot or pull the bell: all's one,

He understands you want him, here he comes.
Just so, I come at the knocking: you, sir, wait
The tongue o' the bell, nor stir before you catch
Reason's clear tingle, nature's clapper brisk,
Or that traditional peal was wont to cheer
Your mother's face turned heavenward: short of these
There 's no authentic intimation, eh?
Well, when you hear, you 'll answer them, start up
And stride into the presence, top of toe,
And there find Sludge beforehand, Sludge that sprang
At noise o' the knuckle on the partition-wall!
I think myself the more religious man.
Religion 's all or nothing; it 's no mere smile
O' contentment, sigh of aspiration, sir —
No quality o' the finelier-tempered clay
Like its whiteness or its lightness; rather, stuff
O' the very stuff, life of life, and self of self.
I tell you, men won't notice; when they do,
They 'll understand. I notice nothing else:
I 'm eyes, ears, mouth of me, one gaze and gape,
Nothing eludes me, everything 's a hint,
Handle and help. It 's all absurd, and yet
There 's something in it all, I know: how much?
No answer! What does that prove? Man 's still man,
Still meant for a poor blundering piece of work
When all 's done; but, if somewhat 's done, like this,
Or not done, is the case the same? Suppose
I blunder in my guess at the true sense
O' the knuckle-summons, nine times out of ten, —
What if the tenth guess happen to be right?
If the tenth shovel-load of powdered quartz
Yield me the nugget? I gather, crush, sift all,
Pass o'er the failure, pounce on the success.
To give you a notion, now — (let who wins, laugh!)
When first I see a man, what do I first?
Why, count the letters which make up his name,
And as their number chances, even or odd,
Arrive at my conclusion, trim my course:
Hiram H. Horsefall is your honored name,
And have n't I found a patron, sir, in you?
"Shall I cheat this stranger?" I take apple-pips,
Stick one in either *canthus* of my eye,
And if the left drops first — (your left, sir, stuck)
I 'm warned, I let the trick alone this time.
You, sir, who smile, superior to such trash,
You judge of character by other rules:

Don't your rules sometimes fail you? Pray, what rule
Have you judged Sludge by hitherto?

Oh, be sure,
You, everybody blunders, just as I,
In simpler things than these by far! For see:
I knew two farmers, — one, a wiseacre
Who studied seasons, rummaged almanacs,
Quoted the dew-point, registered the frost,
And then declared, for outcome of his pains,
Next summer must be dampish: 't was a drought.
His neighbor prophesied such drought would fall,
Saved hay and corn, made cent. per cent. thereby,
And proved a sage indeed: how came his lore?
Because one brindled heifer, late in March,
Stiffened her tail of evenings, and somehow
He got into his head that drought was meant!
I don't expect all men can do as much:
Such kissing goes by favor. You must take
A certain turn of mind for this, — a twist
I' the flesh, as well. Be lazily alive,
Open-mouthed, like my friend the ant-eater,
Letting all nature's loosely-guarded motes
Settle and, slick, be swallowed! Think yourself
The one i' the world, the one for whom the world
Was made, expect it tickling at your mouth!
Then will the swarm of busy buzzing flies,
Clouds of coincidence, break egg-shell, thrive,
Breed, multiply, and bring you food enough.

I can't pretend to mind your smiling, sir!
Oh, what you mean is this! Such intimate way,
Close converse, frank exchange of offices,
Strict sympathy of the immeasurably great
With the infinitely small, betokened here
By a course of signs and omens, raps and sparks, —
How does it suit the dread traditional text
O' the "Great and Terrible Name"? Shall the Heaven of Heavens
Stoop to such child's play?

Please, sir, go with me
A moment, and I 'll try to answer you.
The "*Magnum et terribile*" (is that right?)
Well, folk began with this in the early day;
And all the acts they recognized in proof

Were thunders, lightnings, earthquakes, whirlwinds, dealt
Indisputably on men whose death they caused.
There, and there only, folk saw Providence
At work, — and seeing it, 't was right enough
All heads should tremble, hands wring hands amain,
And knees knock hard together at the breath
O' the Name's first letter; why, the Jews, I 'm told,
Won't write it down, no, to this very hour,
Nor speak aloud: you know best if 't be so.
Each ague-fit of fear at end, they crept
(Because somehow people once born must live)
Out of the sound, sight, swing and sway o' the Name,
Into a corner, the dark rest of the world,
And safe space where as yet no fear had reached;
'T was there they looked about them, breathed again,
And felt indeed at home, as we might say.
The current o' common things, the daily life,
This had their due contempt; no Name pursued
Man from the mountain-top where fires abide,
To his particular mouse-hole at its foot
Where he ate, drank, digested, lived in short:
Such was man's vulgar business, far too small
To be worth thunder: "small," folk kept on, "small,'
With much complacency in those great days!
A mote of sand, you know, a blade of grass —
What was so despicable as mere grass,
Except perhaps the life o' the worm or fly
Which fed there? These were "small" and men were great.
Well, sir, the old way 's altered somewhat since,
And the world wears another aspect now:
Somebody turns our spyglass round, or else
Puts a new lens in it: grass, worm, fly grow big:
We find great things are made of little things,
And little things go lessening till at last
Comes God behind them. Talk of mountains now?
We talk of mould that heaps the mountain, mites
That throng the mould, and God that makes the mites.
The Name comes close behind a stomach-cyst,
The simplest of creations, just a sac
That 's mouth, heart, legs and belly at once, yet lives
And feels, and could do neither, we conclude,
If simplified still further one degree:
The small becomes the dreadful and immense!
Lightning, forsooth? No word more upon that!
A tin-foil bottle, a strip of greasy silk,

With a bit of wire and knob of brass, and there 's
Your dollar's-worth of lightning! But the cyst —
The life of the least of the little things?

No, no!

Preachers and teachers try another tack,
Come near the truth this time: they put aside
Thunder and lightning. "That 's mistake," they cry;
"Thunderbolts fall for neither fright nor sport,
But do appreciable good, like tides,
Changes o' the wind, and other natural facts —
'Good' meaning good to man, his body or soul.
Mediate, immediate, all things minister
To man, — that 's settled: be our future text
'We are His children!'" So, they now harangue
About the intention, the contrivance, all
That keeps up an incessant play of love, —
See the Bridgewater book.

Amen to it!

Well, sir, I put this question: I 'm a child?
I lose no time, but take you at your word:
How shall I act a child's part properly?
Your sainted mother, sir, — used you to live
With such a thought as this a-worrying you?
"She has it in her power to throttle me,
Or stab or poison: she may turn me out,
Or lock me in, — nor stop at this to-day,
But cut me off to-morrow from the estate
I look for" — (long may you enjoy it, sir!)
"In brief, she may unchild the child I am."
You never had such crotchets? Nor have I!
Who, frank confessing childship from the first,
Cannot both fear and take my ease at once,
So, don't fear, — know what might be, well enough,
But know too, child-like, that it will not be,
At least in my case, mine, the son and heir
O' the kingdom, as yourself proclaim my style.
But do you fancy I stop short at this?
Wonder if suit and service, son and heir
Needs must expect, I dare pretend to find?
If, looking for signs proper to such an one,
I straight perceive them irresistible?
Concede that homage is a son's plain right,
And, never mind the nods and raps and winks,
'T is the pure obvious supernatural

Steps forward, does its duty: why, of course!
I have presentiments; my dreams come true:
I fancy a friend stands whistling all in white
Blithe as a boblink, and he 's dead I learn.
I take dislike to a dog my favorite long,
And sell him; he goes mad next week and snaps.
I guess that stranger will turn up to-day
I have not seen these three years; there 's his knock.
I wager "sixty peaches on that tree!" —
That I pick up a dollar in my walk,
That your wife's brother's cousin's name was George —
And win on all points. Oh, you wince at this?
You 'd fain distinguish between gift and gift,
Washington's oracle and Sludge's itch
O' the elbow when at whist he ought to trump?
With Sludge it 's too absurd? *Fine, draw the line*
Somewhere, but, sir, your somewhere is not mine!

Bless us, I 'm turning poet! It 's time to end.
How you have drawn me out, sir! All I ask
Is — am I heir or not heir? If I 'm he,
Then, sir, remember, that same personage
(To judge by what we read i' the newspaper)
Requires, beside one nobleman in gold
To carry up and down his coronet,
Another servant, probably a duke,
To hold eggnog in readiness: why want
Attendance, sir, when helps in his father's house
Abound, I 'd like to know?

Enough of talk!
My fault is that I tell too plain a truth.
Why, which of those who say they disbelieve,
Your clever people, but has dreamed his dream,
Caught his coincidence, stumbled on his fact
He can't explain, (he 'll tell you smilingly,)
Which he 's too much of a philosopher
To count as supernatural, indeed,
So calls a puzzle and problem, proud of it:
Bidding you still be on your guard, you know,
Because one fact don't make a system stand,
Nor prove this an occasional escape
Of spirit beneath the matter: that 's the way!
Just so wild Indians picked up, piece by piece,
The fact in California, the fine gold
That underlay the gravel — hoarded these,

But never made a system stand, nor dug!
So wise men hold out in each hollowed palm
A handful of experience, sparkling fact
They can't explain; and since their rest of life
Is all explainable, what proof in this?
Whereas I take the fact, the grain of gold,
And fling away the dirty rest of life,
And add this grain to the grain each fool has found
O' the million other such philosophers, —
Till I see gold, all gold and only gold,
Truth questionless though unexplainable,
And the miraculous proved the commonplace!
The other fools believed in mud, no doubt —
Failed to know gold they saw: was that so strange?
Are all men born to play Bach's fiddle-fugues,
"Time" with the foil in carte, jump their own height,
Cut the mutton with the broadsword, skate a five,
Make the red hazard with the cue, clip nails
While swimming, in five minutes row a mile,
Pull themselves three feet up with the left arm,
Do sums of fifty figures in their head,
And so on, by the scores of instances?
The Sludge with luck, who sees the spiritual facts,
His fellows strive and fail to see, may rank
With these, and share the advantage.

Ay, but share
The drawback! Think it over by yourself;
I have not heart, sir, and the fire 's gone gray.
Defect somewhere compensates for success,
Every one knows that. Oh, we 're equals, sir!
The big-legged fellow has a little arm
And a less brain, though big legs win the race:
Do you suppose I 'scape the common lot?
Say, I was born with flesh so sensitive,
Soul so alert, that, practice helping both,
I guess what 's going on outside the veil,
Just as a prisoned crane feels pairing-time
In the islands where his kind are, so must fall
To capering by himself some shiny night,
As if your back-yard were a plot of spice —
Thus am I 'ware o' the spirit-world: while you,
Blind as a beetle that way, — for amends,
Why, you can double fist and floor me, sir!
Ride that hot hardmouthed horrid horse of yours,
Laugh while it lightens, play with the great dog,

Speak your mind though it vex some friend to hear,
Never brag, never bluster, never blush, —
In short, you 've pluck, when I 'm a coward — there!
I know it, I can't help it, — folly or no,
I 'm paralyzed, my hand 's no more a hand,
Nor my head, a head, in danger: you can smile
And change the pipe in your cheek. Your gift 's not mine.
Would you swap for mine? No! but you 'd add my gift
To yours: I dare say! I too sigh at times,
Wish I were stouter, could tell truth nor flinch,
Kept cool when threatened, did not mind so much
Being dressed gayly, making strangers stare,
Eating nice things; when I 'd amuse myself,
I shut my eyes and fancy in my brain,
I 'm — now the President, now Jenny Lind,
Now Emerson, now the Benicia Boy —
With all the civilized world a-wondering
And worshipping. I know it 's folly and worse;
I feel such tricks sap, honeycomb the soul,
But I can't cure myself, — despond, despair,
And then, hey, presto, there 's a turn o' the wheel,
Under comes uppermost, fate makes full amends;
Sludge knows and sees and hears a hundred things
You all are blind to, — I 've my taste of truth,
Likewise my touch of falsehood, — vice no doubt,
But you 've your vices also: I 'm content.

What, sir? You won't shake hands? "Because I cheat!"
"You 've found me out in cheating!" That 's enough
To make an apostle swear! Why, when I cheat,
Mean to cheat, do cheat, and am caught in the act,
Are you, or rather, am I sure o' the fact?
(There 's verse again, but I 'm inspired somehow.)
Well then I 'm not sure! I may be, perhaps,
Free as a babe from cheating: how it began,
My gift, — no matter; what 't is got to be
In the end now, that 's the question; answer that!
Had I seen, perhaps, what hand was holding mine,
Leading me whither, I had died of fright:
So, I was made believe I led myself.
If I should lay a six-inch plank from roof
To roof, you would not cross the street, one step,
Even at your mother's summons: but, being shrewd,
If I paste paper on each side the plank
And swear 't is solid pavement, why, you 'll cross
Humming a tune the while, in ignorance

Beacon Street stretches a hundred feet below:
I walked thus, took the paper-cheat for stone.
Some impulse made me set a thing o' the move
Which, started once, ran really by itself;
Beer flows thus, suck the siphon; toss the kite,
It takes the wind and floats of its own force.
Don't let truth's lump rot stagnant for the lack
Of a timely helpful lie to leaven it!
Put a chalk-egg beneath the clucking hen,
She 'll lay a real one, laudably deceived,
Daily for weeks to come. I 've told my lie,
And seen truth follow, marvels none of mine;
All was not cheating, sir, I 'm positive!
I don't know if I move your hand sometimes
When the spontaneous writing spreads so far,
If my knee lifts the table all that height,
Why the inkstand don't fall off the desk a-tilt,
Why the accordion plays a prettier waltz
Than I can pick out on the pianoforte,
Why I speak so much more than I intend,
Describe so many things I never saw.
I tell you, sir, in one sense, I believe
Nothing at all, — that everybody can,
Will, and does cheat: but in another sense
I 'm ready to believe my very self —
That every cheat 's inspired, and every lie
Quick with a germ of truth.

You ask perhaps
Why I should condescend to trick at all
If I know a way without it? This is why!
There 's a strange secret sweet self-sacrifice
In any desecration of one's soul
To a worthy end, — is n't it Herodotus
(I wish I could read Latin!) who describes
The single gift o' the land's virginity,
Demanded in those old Egyptian rites,
(I 've but a hazy notion — help me, sir!)
For one purpose in the world, one day in a life,
One hour in a day — thereafter, purity,
And a veil thrown o'er the past forevermore!
Well now, they understood a many things
Down by Nile city, or wherever it was!
I 've always vowed, after the minute's lie,
And the end's gain, — truth should be mine henceforth.
This goes to the root o' the matter, sir, — this plain

Plump fact: accept it and unlock with it
The wards of many a puzzle!

Or, finally,
Why should I set so fine a gloss on things?
What need I care? I cheat in self-defence,
And there 's my answer to a world of cheats!
Cheat? To be sure, sir! What 's the world worth else?
Who takes it as he finds, and thanks his stars?
Don't it want trimming, turning, furbishing up
And polishing over? Your so-styled great men,
Do they accept one truth as truth is found,
Or try their skill at tinkering? What 's your world?
Here are you born, who are, I 'll say at once,
Of the luckiest kind, whether in head and heart,
Body and soul, or all that helps them both.
Well, now, look back: what faculty of yours
Came to its full, had ample justice done
By growing when rain fell, biding its time,
Solidifying growth when earth was dead,
Spiring up, broadening wide, in seasons due?
Never! You shot up and frost nipped you off,
Settled to sleep when sunshine bade you sprout;
One faculty thwarted its fellow: at the end,
All you boast is, "I had proved a topping tree
In other climes," — yet this was the right clime
Had you foreknown the seasons. Young, you 've force
Wasted like well-streams: old, — oh, then indeed,
Behold a labyrinth of hydraulic pipes
Through which you 'd play off wondrous waterwork;
Only, no water 's left to feed their play.
Young, — you 've a hope, an aim, a love; it 's tossed
And crossed and lost: you struggle on, some spark
Shut in your heart against the puffs around,
Through cold and pain; these in due time subside,
Now then for age's triumph, the hoarded light
You mean to loose on the altered face of things, —
Up with it on the tripod! It 's extinct.
Spend your life's remnant asking, which was best,
Light smothered up that never peeped forth once,
Or the cold cresset with full leave to shine?
Well, accept this too, — seek the fruit of it
Not in enjoyment, proved a dream on earth,
But knowledge, useful for a second chance,
Another life, — you 've lost this world — you 've gained
Its knowledge for the next. — What knowledge, sir,

Except that you know nothing? Nay, you doubt
Whether 't were better have made you man or brute,
If aught be true, if good and evil clash.
No foul, no fair, no inside, no outside,
There 's your world!

Give it me! I slap it brisk
With harlequin's pasteboard sceptre: what 's it now?
Changed like a rock-flat, rough with rusty weed,
At first wash-over o' the returning wave!
All the dry dead impracticable stuff
Starts into life and light again; this world
Pervaded by the influx from the next.
I cheat, and what 's the happy consequence?
You find full justice straightway dealt you out,
Each want supplied, each ignorance set at ease,
Each folly fooled. No life-long labor now
As the price of worse than nothing! No mere film
Holding you chained in iron, as it seems,
Against the outstretch of your very arms
And legs i' the sunshine moralists forbid!
What would you have? Just speak and, there, you see!
You 're supplemented, made a whole at last,
Bacon advises, Shakespeare writes you songs,
And Mary Queen of Scots embraces you.
Thus it goes on, not quite like life perhaps,
But so near, that the very difference piques,
Shows that e'en better than this best will be —
This passing entertainment in a hut
Whose bare walls take your taste since, one stage more,
And you arrive at the palace: all half real,
And you, to suit it, less than real beside,
In a dream, lethargic kind of death in life,
That helps the interchange of natures, flesh
Transfused by souls, and such souls! Oh, 't is choice!
And if at whiles the bubble, blown too thin,
Seem nigh on bursting, — if you nearly see
The real world through the false, — what *do* you see?
Is the old so ruined? You find you 're in a flock
O' the youthful, earnest, passionate — genius, beauty,
Rank and wealth also, if you care for these·
And all depose their natural rights, hail you
(That 's me, sir) as their mate and yoke-fellow.
Participate in Sludgehood — nay, grow mine,
I veritably possess them — banish doubt,
And reticence and modesty alike!

Why, here 's the Golden Age, old Paradise
Or new Utopia! Here 's true life indeed,
And the world well won now, mine for the first time!

And all this might be, may be, and with good help
Of a little lying shall be: so, Sludge lies!
Why, he 's at worst your poet who sings how Greeks
That never were, in Troy which never was,
Did this or the other impossible great thing!
He 's Lowell — it 's a world (you smile applause)
Of his own invention — wondrous Longfellow,
Surprising Hawthorne! Sludge does more than they,
And acts the books they write: the more his praise!

But why do I mount to poets? Take plain prose —
Dealers in common sense, set these at work,
What can they do without their helpful lies?
Each states the law and fact and face o' the thing
Just as he 'd have them, finds what he thinks fit,
Is blind to what missuits him, just records
What makes his case out, quite ignores the rest.
It 's a History of the World, the Lizard Age,
The Early Indians, the Old Country War,
Jerome Napoleon, whatsoever you please,
All as the author wants it. Such a scribe
You pay and praise for putting life in stones,
Fire into fog, making the past your world.
There 's plenty of "How did you contrive to grasp
The thread which led you through this labyrinth?
How build such solid fabric out of air?
How on so slight foundation found this tale,
Biography, narrative?" or, in other words,
"How many lies did it require to make
The portly truth you here present us with?"
"Oh," quoth the penman, purring at your praise,
"'T is fancy all; no particle of fact:
I was poor and threadbare when I wrote that book
'Bliss in the Golden City.' I, at Thebes?
We writers paint out of our heads, you see!"
"— Ah, the more wonderful the gift in you,
The more creativeness and godlike craft!"
But I, do I present you with my piece,
It 's "What, Sludge? When my sainted mother spoke
The verses Lady Jane Grey last composed
About the rosy bower in the seventh heaven
Where she and Queen Elizabeth keep house, —

You made the raps? 'T was your invention that?
Cur, slave, and devil!" — eight fingers and two thumbs
Stuck in my throat!

Well, if the marks seem gone,
'T is because stiffish cocktail, taken in time,
Is better for a bruise than arnica.
There, sir! I bear no malice: 't is n't in me.
I know I acted wrongly: still, I've tried
What I could say in my excuse, — to show
The devil 's not all devil . . . . I don't pretend
He 's angel, much less such a gentleman
As you, sir! And I 've lost you, lost myself,
Lost all-l-l-l- . . .

No — are you in earnest, sir?
Oh, yours, sir, is an angel's part! I know
What prejudice prompts, and what 's the common course
Men take to soothe their ruffled self-conceit:
Only you rise superior to it all!
No, sir, it don't hurt much; it 's speaking long
That makes me choke a little: the marks will go!
What? Twenty V-notes more, and outfit too,
And not a word to Greeley? One — one kiss
O' the hand that saves me! You'll not let me speak,
I well know, and I 've lost the right, too true!
But I must say, sir, if She hears (she does)
Your sainted . . . . Well, sir, — be it so! That 's, I think,
My bedroom candle. Good-night! Bl-l-less you, sir!

R-r-r, you brute-beast and blackguard! Cowardly scamp!
I only wish I dared burn down the house
And spoil your sniggering! Oh, what, you 're the man?
You 're satisfied at last? You 've found out Sludge?
We 'll see that presently: my turn, sir, next!
I too can tell my story: brute, — do you hear? —
You throttled your sainted mother, that old hag,
In just such a fit of passion: no, it was . . . .
To get this house of hers, and many a note
Like these . . . I 'll pocket them, however . . . five,
Ten, fifteen . . . ay, you gave her throat the twist,
Or else you poisoned her! Confound the cuss!
Where was my head? I ought to have prophesied
He 'll die in a year and join her: that 's the way.

I don't know where my head is: what had I done?
How did it all go? I said he poisoned her,
And hoped he'd have grace given him to repent,
Whereon he picked this quarrel, bullied me
And called me cheat: I thrashed him, — who could help?
He howled for mercy, prayed me on his knees
To cut and run and save him from disgrace:
I do so, and once off, he slanders me.
An end of him! Begin elsewhere anew!
Boston's a hole, the herring-pond is wide,
V-notes are something, liberty still more.
Beside, is he the only fool in the world?

APPARENT FAILURE.

"We shall soon lose a celebrated building."
Paris Newspaper.

I.

No, for I'll save it! Seven years since,
I passed through Paris, stopped a day
To see the baptism of your Prince;
Saw, made my bow, and went my way:
Walking the heat and headache off,
I took the Seine-side, you surmise,
Thought of the Congress, Gortschakoff,
Cavour's appeal and Buol's replies,
So sauntered till — what met my eyes?

II.

Only the Doric little Morgue!
The dead-house where you show your drowned:
Petrarch's Vaucluse makes proud the Sorgue,
Your Morgue has made the Seine renowned.
One pays one's debt in such a case;
I plucked up heart and entered, — stalked,
Keeping a tolerable face
Compared with some whose cheeks were chalked:
Let them! No Briton's to be balked!

III.

First came the silent gazers; next,
A screen of glass, we're thankful for;
Last, the sight's self, the sermon's text,

The three men who did most abhor
Their life in Paris yesterday,
So killed themselves: and now, enthroned
Each on his copper couch, they lay
Fronting me, waiting to be owned.
I thought, and think, their sin 's atoned.

IV.

Poor men, God made, and all for that!
The reverence struck me; o'er each head
Religiously was hung its hat,
Each coat dripped by the owner's bed,
Sacred from touch: each had his berth,
His bounds, his proper place of rest,
Who last night tenanted on earth
Some arch, where twelve such slept abreast,—
Unless the plain asphalte seemed best.

V.

How did it happen, my poor boy?
You wanted to be Buonaparte
And have the Tuileries for toy,
And could not, so it broke your heart?
You, old one by his side, I judge,
Were, red as blood, a socialist,
A leveller! Does the Empire grudge
You 've gained what no Republic missed?
Be quiet, and unclench your fist!

VI.

And this — why, he was red in vain,
Or black, — poor fellow that is blue!
What fancy was it, turned your brain?
Oh, women were the prize for you!
Money gets women, cards and dice
Get money, and ill-luck gets just
The copper couch and one clear nice
Cool squirt of water o'er your bust,
The right thing to extinguish lust!

VII.

It 's wiser being good than bad;
It 's safer being meek than fierce:
It 's fitter being sane than mad.
My own hope is, a sun will pierce

The thickest cloud earth ever stretched;
  That, after Last, returns the First,
Though a wide compass round be fetched;
  That what began best, can't end worst,
Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.

EPILOGUE.

FIRST SPEAKER, *as David.*

I.

On the first of the Feast of Feasts,
  The Dedication Day,
When the Levites joined the Priests
  At the Altar in robed array,
Gave signal to sound and say, —

II.

When the thousands, rear and van,
  Swarming with one accord,
Became as a single man
  (Look, gesture, thought and word)
In praising and thanking the Lord, —

III.

When the singers lift up their voice,
  And the trumpets made endeavor,
Sounding, "In God rejoice!"
  Saying, "In Him rejoice
Whose mercy endureth forever!" —

IV.

Then the Temple filled with a cloud,
  Even the House of the Lord;
Porch bent and pillar bowed:
  For the presence of the Lord,
In the glory of His cloud,
  Had filled the House of the Lord.

SECOND SPEAKER, *as Renan.*

Gone now! All gone across the dark so far,
  Sharpening fast, shuddering ever, shutting still,

Dwindling into the distance, dies that star
  Which came, stood, opened once! We gazed our fill
With upturned faces on as real a Face
  That, stooping from grave music and mild fire,
Took in our homage, made a visible place
  Through many a depth of glory, gyre on gyre,
For the dim human tribute. Was this true?
  Could man indeed avail, mere praise of his,
To help by rapture God's own rapture too,
  Thrill with a heart's red tinge that pure pale bliss?
Why did it end? Who failed to beat the breast,
  And shriek, and throw the arms protesting wide,
When a first shadow showed the star addressed
  Itself to motion, and on either side
The rims contracted as the rays retired;
  The music, like a fountain's sickening pulse,
Subsided on itself; awhile transpired
  Some vestige of a Face no pangs convulse,
No prayers retard; then even this was gone,
  Lost in the night at last. We, lone and left
Silent through centuries, ever and anon
  Venture to probe again the vault bereft
Of all now save the lesser lights, a mist
  Of multitudinous points, yet suns, men say —
And this leaps ruby, this lurks amethyst,
  But where may hide what came and loved our clay?
How shall the sage detect in yon expanse
  The star which chose to stoop and stay for us?
Unroll the records! Hailed ye such advance
  Indeed, and did your hope evanish thus?
Watchers of twilight, is the worst averred?
  We shall not look up, know ourselves are seen,
Speak, and be sure that we again are heard,
  Acting or suffering, have the disk's serene
Reflect our life, absorb an earthly flame,
  Nor doubt that, were mankind inert and numb,
Its core had never crimsoned all the same,
  Nor, missing ours, its music fallen dumb?
Oh, dread succession to a dizzy post,
  Sad sway of sceptre whose mere touch appalls,
Ghastly dethronement, cursed by those the most
  On whose repugnant brow the crown next falls!

THIRD SPEAKER.

I.

Witless alike of will and way divine,
How heaven's high with earth's low should intertwine!
Friends, I have seen through your eyes: now use mine!

II.

Take the least man of all mankind, as I;
Look at his head and heart, find how and why
He differs from his fellows utterly:

III.

Then, like me, watch when nature by degrees
Grows alive round him, as in Arctic seas
(They said of old) the instinctive water flees

IV.

Toward some elected point of central rock,
As though, for its sake only, roamed the flock
Of waves about the waste: awhile they mock

V.

With radiance caught for the occasion, — hues
Of blackest hell now, now such reds and blues
As only heaven could fitly interfuse, —

VI.

The mimic monarch of the whirlpool, king
O' the current for a minute: then they wring
Up by the roots and oversweep the thing,

VII.

And hasten off, to play again elsewhere
The same part, choose another peak as bare,
They find and flatter, feast and finish there.

VIII.

When you see what I tell you, — nature dance
About each man of us, retire, advance,
As though the pageant's end were to enhance

IX.

His worth, and — once the life, his product, gained —
Roll away elsewhere, keep the strife sustained,
And show thus real, a thing the North but feigned —

X.

When you acknowledge that one world could do
All the diverse work, old yet ever new,
Divide us, each from other, me from you, —

XI.

Why, where 's the need of Temple, when the walls
O' the world are that? What use of swells and falls
From Levites' choir, Priests' cries, and trumpet-calls?

XII.

That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Become my universe that feels and knows!

BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE

INCLUDING

A TRANSCRIPT FROM EURIPIDES

Our Euripides, the Human,
With his droppings of warm tears,
And his touches of things common
Till they rose to touch the spheres.

TO THE COUNTESS COWPER.

If I mention the simple truth, that this poem absolutely owes its existence to you, — who not only suggested, but imposed on me as a task, what has proved the most delightful of May-month amusements, — I shall seem honest, indeed, but hardly prudent; for, how good and beautiful ought such a poem to be!

Euripides might fear little; but I, also, have an interest in the performance; and what wonder if I beg you to suffer that it make, in another and far easier sense, its nearest possible approach to those Greek qualities of goodness and beauty, by laying itself gratefully at your feet?

LONDON, July 23, 1871. R. B.

ABOUT that strangest, saddest, sweetest song
I, when a girl, heard in Kameiros once,
And, after, saved my life by? Oh, so glad
To tell you the adventure!
Petalé,
Phullis, Charopé, Chrusion! You must know,
This "after" fell in that unhappy time
When poor reluctant Nikias, pushed by fate,
Went falteringly against Syracuse;
And there shamed Athens, lost her ships and men,
And gained a grave, or death without a grave.
I was at Rhodes — the isle, not Rhodes the town,
Mine was Kameiros — when the news arrived:
Our people rose in tumult, cried, "No more

Duty to Athens, let us join the League
And side with Sparta, share the spoil, — at worst,
Abjure a headship that will ruin Greece!"
And so, they sent to Knidos for a fleet
To come and help revolters. Ere help came, —
Girl as I was, and never out of Rhodes
The whole of my first fourteen years of life,
But nourished with Ilissian mother's-milk, —
I passionately cried to who would hear
And those who loved me at Kameiros — "No!
Never throw Athens off for Sparta's sake —
Never disloyal to the life and light
Of the whole world worth calling world at all!
Rather go die at Athens, lie outstretched
For feet to trample on, before the gate
Of Diomedes or the Hippadai,
Before the temples and among the tombs,
Than tolerate the grim felicity
Of harsh Lakonia! Ours the fasts and feasts,
Choës and Chutroi; ours the sacred grove,
Agora, Dikasteria, Poikilé,
Pnux, Keramikos; Salamis in sight,
Psuttalia, Marathon itself, not far!
Ours the great Dionusiac theatre,
And tragic triad of immortal fames,
Aischulos, Sophokles, Euripides!
To Athens, all of us that have a soul,
Follow me!" And I wrought so with my prayer,
That certain of my kinsfolk crossed the strait
And found a ship at Kaunos; well-disposed
Because the Captain — where did he draw breath
First but within Psuttalia? Thither fled
A few like-minded as ourselves. We turned
The glad prow westward, soon were out at sea,
Pushing, brave ship with the vermilion cheek,
Proud for our heart's true harbor. But a wind
Lay ambushed by Point Malea of bad fame,
And leapt out, bent us from our course. Next day
Broke stormless, so broke next blue day and next.
"But whither bound in this white waste?" we plagued
The pilot's old experience: "Cos or Crete?"
Because he promised us the land ahead.
While we strained eyes to share in what he saw,
The Captain's shout startled us; round we rushed:
What hung behind us but a pirate-ship
Panting for the good prize! "Row! harder row!

Row for dear life!" the Captain cried: "'t is Crete,
Friendly Crete looming large there! Beat this craft
That 's but a keles, one-benched pirate-bark,
Lokrian, or that bad breed off Thessaly!
Only, so cruel are such water-thieves,
No man of you, no woman, child, or slave,
But falls their prey, once let them board our boat!"
So, furiously our oarsmen rowed and rowed;
And when the oars flagged somewhat, dash and dip,
As we approached the coast and safety, so
That we could hear behind us plain the threats
And curses of the pirate panting up
In one more throe and passion of pursuit,—
Seeing our oars flag in the rise and fall,
I sprang upon the altar by the mast
And sang aloft — some genius prompting me —
That song of ours which saved at Salamis:
"O sons of Greeks, go, set your country free,
Free your wives, free your children, free the fanes
O' the Gods, your fathers founded,— sepulchres
They sleep in! Or save all, or all be lost!"
Then, in a frenzy, so the noble oars
Churned the black water white, that well away
We drew, soon saw land rise, saw hills grow up,
Saw spread itself a sea-wide town with towers,
Not fifty stadia distant; and, betwixt,
A large bay and a small, the islet-bar,
Even Ortugia's self — oh, luckless we!
For here was Sicily and Syracuse:
We ran upon the lion from the wolf.
Ere we drew breath, took counsel, out there came
A galley, hailed us. "Who asks entry here
In war-time? Are you Sparta's friend or foe?"
"Kaunians,"— our Captain judged his best reply,
"The mainland-seaport that belongs to Rhodes;
Rhodes that casts in her lot now with the League,
Forsaking Athens,— you have heard belike!"
"Ay, but we heard all Athens in one ode
Just now! we heard her in that Aischulos!
You bring a boatful of Athenians here,
Kaunians although you be: and prudence bids,
For Kaunos' sake, why, carry them unhurt
To Kaunos, if you will: for Athens' sake,
Back must you, though ten pirates blocked the bay!
We want no colony from Athens here,
With memories of Salamis, forsooth,

To spirit up our captives, that pale crowd
I' the quarry, whom the daily pint of corn
Keeps in good order and submissiveness."
Then the gray Captain prayed them by the Gods,
And by their own knees, and their fathers' beards,
They should not wickedly thrust suppliants back,
But save the innocent on traffic bound —
Or, maybe, some Athenian family
Perishing of desire to die at home, —
From that vile foe still lying on its oars,
Waiting the issue in the distance. Vain!
Words to the wind! And we were just about
To turn and face the foe, as some tired bird
Barbarians pelt at, drive with shouts away
From shelter in what rocks, however rude,
She makes for, to escape the kindled eye,
Split beak, crook'd claw o' the creature, cormorant
Or ossifrage, that, hardly baffled, hangs
Afloat i' the foam, to take her if she turn.
So were we at destruction's very edge,
When those o' the galley, as they had discussed
A point, a question raised by somebody,
A matter mooted in a moment, — "Wait!"
Cried they (and wait we did, you may be sure).
"That song was veritable Aischulos,
Familiar to the mouth of man and boy,
Old glory: how about Euripides?
The newer and not yet so famous bard,
He that was born upon the battle-day
While that song and the salpinx sounded him
Into the world, first sound, at Salamis —
Might you know any of his verses too?"

Now, some one of the Gods inspired this speech:
Since ourselves knew what happened but last year —
How, when Gulippos gained his victory
Over poor Nikias, poor Demosthenes,
And Syracuse condemned the conquered force
To dig and starve i' the quarry, branded them —
Freeborn Athenians, brute-like in the front
With horse-head brands,— ah, "Region of the Steed"! —
Of all these men immersed in misery,
It was found none had been advantaged so
By aught in the past life he used to prize
And pride himself concerning, — no rich man
By riches, no wise man by wisdom, no

Wiser man still (as who loved more the Muse)
By storing, at brain's edge and tip of tongue,
Old glory, great plays that had long ago
Made themselves wings to fly about the world, —
Not one such man was helped so at his need
As certain few that (wisest they of all)
Had, at first summons, oped heart, flung door wide
At the new knocking of Euripides,
Nor drawn the bolt with who cried "Decadence!
And, after Sophokles, be nature dumb!"
Such, — and I see in it God Bacchos' boon
To souls that recognized his latest child,
He who himself, born latest of the Gods,
Was stoutly held impostor by mankind, —
Such were in safety: any who could speak
A chorus to the end, or prologize,
Roll out a rhesis, wield some golden length
Stiffened by wisdom out into a line,
Or thrust and parry in bright monostich,
Teaching Euripides to Syracuse —
Any such happy man had prompt reward:
If he lay bleeding on the battlefield
They stanched his wounds and gave him drink and food;
If he were slave i' the house, for reverence
They rose up, bowed to who proved master now,
And bade him go free, thank Euripides!
Ay, and such did so: many such, he said,
Returning home to Athens, sought him out,
The old bard in the solitary house,
And thanked him ere they went to sacrifice.
I say, we knew that story of last year!

Therefore, at mention of Euripides,
The Captain crowed out, "Euoi, praise the God!
Oöp, boys, bring our owl-shield to the fore!
Out with our Sacred Anchor! Here she stands,
Balaustion! Strangers, greet the lyric girl!
Euripides? Babai! what a word there 'scaped
Your teeth's enclosure, quoth my grandsire's song!
Why, fast as snow in Thrace, the voyage through,
Has she been falling thick in flakes of him!
Frequent as figs at Kaunos, Kaunians said.
Balaustion, stand forth and confirm my speech!
Now it was some whole passion of a play;
Now, peradventure, but a honey-drop
That slipt its comb i' the chorus. If there rose

A star, before I could determine steer
Southward or northward — if a cloud surprised
Heaven, ere I fairly hollaed 'Furl the sail!' —
She had at finger's end both cloud and star;
Some thought that perched there, tame and tunable,
Fitted with wings; and still, as off it flew,
'So sang Euripides,' she said, 'so sang
The meteoric poet of air and sea,
Planets and the pale populace of heaven,
The mind of man, and all that 's made to soar!'
And so, although she has some other name,
We only call her Wild-pomegranate-flower,
Balaustion; since, where'er the red bloom burns
I' the dull dark verdure of the bounteous tree,
Dethroning, in the Rosy Isle, the rose,
You shall find food, drink, odor, all at once;
Cool leaves to bind about an aching brow,
And, never much away, the nightingale.
Sing them a strophe, with the turn-again,
Down to the verse that ends all, proverb-like,
And save us, thou Balaustion, bless the name!"

But I cried, "Brother Greek! better than so, —
Save us, and I have courage to recite
The main of a whole play from first to last;
That strangest, saddest, sweetest song of his,
ALKESTIS; which was taught, long years ago,
At Athens, in Glaukinos' archonship,
But only this year reached our Isle o' the Rose.
I saw it at Kameiros; played the same,
They say, as for the right Lenean feast
In Athens; and beside the perfect piece —
Its beauty and the way it makes you weep, —
There is much honor done your own loved God
Herakles, whom you house i' the city here
Nobly, the Temple wide Greece talks about!
I come a suppliant to your Herakles!
Take me and put me on his temple-steps,
To tell you his achievement as I may,
And, that told, he shall bid you set us free!"

Then, because Greeks are Greeks, and hearts are hearts,
And poetry is power, — they all outbroke
In a great joyous laughter with much love:
"Thank Herakles for the good holiday!
Make for the harbor! Row, and let voice ring,

'In we row, bringing more Euripides!'"
All the crowd, as they lined the harbor now,
"More of Euripides!" — took up the cry.
We landed; the whole city, soon astir,
Came rushing out of gates in common joy
To the suburb temple; there they stationed me
O' the topmost step: and plain I told the play,
Just as I saw it; what the actors said,
And what I saw, or thought I saw the while,
At our Kameiros theatre, clean-scooped
Out of a hillside, with the sky above
And sea before our seats in marble row:
Told it, and, two days more, repeated it,
Until they sent us on our way again
With good words and great wishes.
Oh, for me —
A wealthy Syracusan brought a whole
Talent and bade me take it for myself:
I left it on the tripod in the fane,
— For had not Herakles a second time
Wrestled with Death and saved devoted ones? —
Thank-offering to the hero. And a band
Of captives, whom their lords grew kinder to
Because they called the poet countryman,
Sent me a crown of wild-pomegranate-flower:
So, I shall live and die Balaustion now.
But one — one man — one youth, — three days, each day, —
(If, ere I lifted up my voice to speak,
I gave a downward glance by accident,)
Was found at foot o' the temple. When we sailed,
There, in the ship too, was he found as well,
Having a hunger to see Athens too.
We reached Peiraieus; when I landed — lo,
He was beside me. Anthesterion-month
Is just commencing: when its moon rounds full,
We are to marry. O Euripides!

I saw the master: when we found ourselves
(Because the young man needs must follow me)
Firm on Peiraieus, I demanded first
Whither to go and find him. Would you think?
The story how he saved us made some smile:
They wondered strangers were exorbitant
In estimation of Euripides.
He was not Aischulos nor Sophokles:
— "Then, of our younger bards who boast the bay,
Had I sought Agathon, or Iophon,

Or, what now had it been Kephisophon?
A man that never kept good company,
The most unsociable of poet-kind,
All beard that was not freckle in his face!"

I soon was at the tragic house, and saw
The master, held the sacred hand of him
And laid it to my lips. Men love him not:
How should they? Nor do they much love his friend
Sokrates: but those two have fellowship:
Sokrates often comes to hear him read,
And never misses if he teach a piece.
Both, being old, will soon have company,
Sit with their peers above the talk. Meantime,
He lives as should a statue in its niche;
Cold walls enclose him, mostly darkness there,
Alone, unless some foreigner uncouth
Breaks in, sits, stares an hour, and so departs,
Brain-stuffed with something to sustain his life,
Dry to the marrow 'mid much merchandise.
How should such know and love the man?
Why, mark!
Even when I told the play and got the praise,
There spoke up a brisk little somebody,
Critic and whippersnapper, in a rage
To set things right: "The girl departs from truth!
Pretends she saw what was not to be seen,
Making the mask of the actor move, forsooth!
'Then a fear flitted o'er the wife's white face,'—
'Then frowned the father,'—'then the husband shook,'—
'Then from the festal forehead slipt each spray,
And the heroic mouth's gay grace was gone;'—
As she had seen each naked fleshly face,
And not the merely-painted mask it wore!"
Well, is the explanation difficult?
What's poetry except a power that makes?
And, speaking to one sense, inspires the rest,
Pressing them all into its service; so
That who sees painting, seems to hear as well
The speech that's proper for the painted mouth;
And who hears music, feels his solitude
Peopled at once—for how count heartbeats plain
Unless a company, with hearts which beat,
Come close to the musician, seen or no?
And who receives true verse at eye or ear,
Takes in (with verse) time, place, and person too,

So, links each sense on to its sister-sense,
Grace-like: and what if but one sense of three
Front you at once? The sidelong pair conceive
Through faintest touch of finest finger-tips, —
Hear, see and feel, in faith's simplicity,
Alike, what one was sole recipient of:
Who hears the poem, therefore, sees the play.

Enough and too much! Hear the play itself!
Under the grape-vines, by the streamlet-side,
Close to Baccheion; till the cool increase,
And other stars steal on the evening-star,
And so, we homeward flock i' the dusk, we five!
You will expect, no one of all the words
O' the play but is grown part now of my soul,
Since the adventure. 'T is the poet speaks:
But if I, too, should try and speak at times,
Leading your love to where my love, perchance,
Climbed earlier, found a nest before you knew —
Why, bear with the poor climber, for love's sake!
Look at Baccheion's beauty opposite,
The temple with the pillars at the porch!
See you not something beside masonry?
What if my words wind in and out the stone
As yonder ivy, the God's parasite?
Though they leap all the way the pillar leads,
Festoon about the marble, foot to frieze,
And serpentiningly enrich the roof,
Toy with some few bees and a bird or two, —
What then? The column holds the cornice up!

There slept a silent palace in the sun,
With plains adjacent and Thessalian peace —
Pherai, where King Admetos ruled the land.

Out from the portico there gleamed a God,
Apollon: for the bow was in his hand,
The quiver at his shoulder, all his shape
One dreadful beauty. And he hailed the house,
As if he knew it well and loved it much:
"O Admeteian domes, where I endured,
Even the God I am, to drudge awhile,
Do righteous penance for a reckless deed,
Accepting the slaves' table thankfully!"

Then told how Zeus had been the cause of all,
Raising the wrath in him which took revenge
And slew those forgers of the thunderbolt
Wherewith Zeus blazed the life from out the breast
Of Phoibos' son Asklepios (I surmise,
Because he brought the dead to life again),
And so, for punishment, must needs go slave,
God as he was, with a mere mortal lord:
—Told how he came to King Admetos' land,
And played the ministrant, was herdsman there,
Warding all harm away from him and his
Till now; "For, holy as I am," said he,
"The lord I chanced upon was holy too:
Whence I deceived the Moirai, drew from death
My master, this same son of Pheres,—ay,
The Goddesses conceded him escape
From Hades, when the fated day should fall,
Could he exchange lives, find some friendly one
Ready, for his sake, to content the grave.
But trying all in turn, the friendly list,
Why, he found no one, none who loved so much,
Nor father, nor the aged mother's self
That bore him, no, not any save his wife,
Willing to die instead of him and watch
Never a sunrise nor a sunset more:
And she is even now within the house,
Upborne by pitying hands, the feeble frame
Gasping its last of life out; since to-day
Destiny is accomplished, and she dies,
And I, lest here pollution light on me,
Leave, as ye witness, all my wonted joy
In this dear dwelling. Ay,—for here comes Death
Close on us of a sudden! who, pale priest
Of the mute people, means to bear his prey
To the house of Hades. The symmetric step!
How he treads true to time and place and thing,
Dogging day, hour and minute, for death's-due!"

And we observed another Deity,
Half in, half out the portal,—watch and ward,—
Eying his fellow: formidably fixed,
Yet faltering too at who affronted him,
As somehow disadvantaged, should they strive.
Like some dread heapy blackness, ruffled wing,
Convulsed and cowering head that is all eye,
Which proves a ruined eagle who, too blind
Swooping in quest o' the quarry, fawn or kid,

Descried deep down the chasm 'twixt rock and rock,
Has wedged and mortised, into either wall
O' the mountain, the pent earthquake of his power;
So lies, half hurtless yet still terrible,
Just when — who stalks up, who stands front to front,
But the great lion-guarder of the gorge,
Lord of the ground, a stationed glory there!
Yet he too pauses ere he try the worst
O' the frightful unfamiliar nature, new
To the chasm, indeed, but elsewhere known enough,
Among the shadows and the silences
Above i' the sky: so, each antagonist
Silently faced his fellow and forbore.
Till Death shrilled, hard and quick, in spite and fear:

"Ha, ha, and what mayst thou do at the domes,
Why hauntest here, thou Phoibos? Here again
At the old injustice, limiting our rights,
Balking of honor due us Gods o' the grave?
Was't not enough for thee to have delayed
Death from Admetos, — with thy crafty art
Cheating the very Fates, — but thou must arm
The bow-hand and take station, press 'twixt me
And Pelias' daughter, who then saved her spouse, —
Did just that, now thou comest to undo, —
Taking his place to die, Alkestis here?"
But the God sighed, "Have courage! All my arms,
This time, are simple justice and fair words."

Then each plied each with rapid interchange:

"What need of bow, were justice arms enough?"

"Ever it is my wont to bear the bow."

"Ay, and with bow, not justice, help this house!"

"I help it, since a friend's woe weighs me too."

"And now, — wilt force from me this second corpse?"

"By force I took no corpse at first from thee."

"How then is he above ground, not beneath?"

"He gave his wife instead of him, thy prey."

"And prey, this time at least, I bear below!"

"Go take her! — for I doubt persuading thee . . ."

"To kill the doomed one? What my function else?"

"No! Rather, to dispatch the true mature."

"Truly I take thy meaning, see thy drift!"

"Is there a way then she may reach old age?"

"No way! I glad me in my honors too!"

"But, young or old, thou tak'st one life, no more!"

"Younger they die, greater my praise redounds!"

"If she die old, — the sumptuous funeral!"

"Thou layest down a law the rich would like."

"How so? Did wit lurk there and 'scape thy sense?"

"Who could buy substitutes would die old men."

"It seems thou wilt not grant me, then, this grace?"

"This grace I will not grant: thou know'st my ways."

"Ways harsh to men, hateful to Gods, at least!"

"All things thou canst not have: my rights for me!"

And then Apollon prophesied, — I think,
More to himself than to impatient Death,
Who did not hear or would not heed the while, —
For he went on to say, "Yet even so,
Cruel above the measure, thou shalt clutch
No life here! Such a man do I perceive
Advancing to the house of Pheres now,
Sent by Eurustheus to bring out of Thrace,
The winter world, a chariot with its steeds!
He indeed, when Admetos proves the host,
And he the guest, at the house here, — he it is
Shall bring to bear such force, and from thy hands

Rescue this woman! Grace no whit to me
Will that prove, since thou dost thy deed the same,
And earnest too my hate, and all for nought!"

But how should Death or stay or understand?
Doubtless, he only felt the hour was come,
And the sword free; for he but flung some taunt —
"Having talked much, thou wilt not gain the more!
This woman, then, descends to Hades' hall
Now that I rush on her, begin the rites
O' the sword; for sacred, to us Gods below,
That head whose hair this sword shall sanctify!"

And, in the fire-flash of the appalling sword,
The uprush and the outburst, the onslaught
Of Death's portentous passage through the door,
Apollon stood a pitying moment-space:
I caught one last gold gaze upon the night
Nearing the world now: and the God was gone,
And mortals left to deal with misery,
As in came stealing slow, now this, now that
Old sojourner throughout the country-side,
Servants grown friends to those unhappy here:
And, cloudlike in their increase, all these griefs
Broke and began the over-brimming wail,
Out of a common impulse, word by word.

"What now may mean the silence at the door?
Why is Admetos' mansion stricken dumb?
Not one friend near, to say if we should mourn
Our mistress dead, or if Alkestis lives
And sees the light still, Pelias' child — to me,
To all, conspicuously the best of wives
That ever was toward husband in this world!
Hears anyone or wail beneath the roof,
Or hands that strike each other, or the groan
Announcing all is done and nought to dread?
Still not a servant stationed at the gates!
O Paian, that thou would'st dispart the wave
O' the woe, be present! Yet, had woe o'erwhelmed
The housemates, they were hardly silent thus:
It cannot be, the dead is forth and gone.
Whence comes thy gleam of hope? I dare not hope:
What is the circumstance that heartens thee?
How could Admetos have dismissed a wife
So worthy, unescorted to the grave?

Before the gates I see no hallowed vase
Of fountain-water, such as suits death's door;
Nor any clipt locks strew the vestibule,
Though surely these drop when we grieve the dead,
Nor hand sounds smitten against youthful hand,
The women's way. And yet — the appointed time —
How speak the word? — this day is even the day
Ordained her for departing from its light.
O touch calamitous to heart and soul!
Needs must one, when the good are tortured so,
Sorrow, — one reckoned faithful from the first."

Then their souls rose together, and one sigh
Went up in cadence from the common mouth:
How "Vainly — anywhither in the world
Directing or land-labor or sea-search —
To Lukia or the sand-waste, Ammon's seat —
Might you set free their hapless lady's soul
From the abrupt Fate's footstep instant now.
Not a sheep-sacrificer at the hearths
Of Gods had they to go to: one there was
Who, if his eyes saw light still, — Phoibos' son, —
Had wrought so, she might leave the shadowy place
And Hades' portal; for he propped up Death's
Subdued ones, till the Zeus-flung thunder-flame
Struck him; and now what hope of life were hailed
With open arms? For, all the king could do
Is done already, — not one God whereof
The altar fails to reek with sacrifice:
And for assuagement of these evils — nought!"

But here they broke off, for a matron moved
Forth from the house: and, as her tears flowed fast,
They gathered round. "What fortune shall we hear?
For mourning thus, if aught affect thy lord,
We pardon thee: but lives the lady yet
Or has she perished? — that we fain would know!"

"Call her dead, call her living, each style serves,"
The matron said: "though grave-ward bowed, she breathed
Nor knew her husband what the misery meant
Before he felt it: hope of life was none:
The appointed day pressed hard; the funeral pomp
He had prepared too."

When the friends broke out,
"Let her in dying know herself at least

Sole wife, of all the wives 'neath the sun wide,
For glory and for goodness!" — "Ah, how else
Than best? who controverts the claim?" quoth she:
"What kind of creature should the woman prove
That has surpassed Alkestis? — surelier shown
Preference for her husband to herself
Than by determining to die for him?
But so much all our city knows indeed:
Hear what she did indoors and wonder then!
For, when she felt the crowning day was come,
She washed with river-waters her white skin,
And, taking from the cedar closets forth
Vesture and ornament, bedecked herself
Nobly, and stood before the hearth, and prayed:
'Mistress, because I now depart the world,
Falling before thee the last time, I ask —
Be mother to my orphans! wed the one
To a kind wife, and make the other's mate
Some princely person: nor, as I who bore
My children perish, suffer that they too
Die all untimely, but live, happy pair,
Their full glad life out in the fatherland!'
And every altar through Admetos' house
She visited and crowned and prayed before,
Stripping the myrtle-foliage from the boughs,
Without a tear, without a groan, — no change
At all to that skin's nature, fair to see,
Caused by the imminent evil. But this done, —
Reaching her chamber, falling on her bed,
There, truly, burst she into tears and spoke:
'O bride-bed, where I loosened from my life
Virginity for that same husband's sake
Because of whom I die now — fare thee well!
Since nowise do I hate thee: me alone
Hast thou destroyed; for, shrinking to betray
Thee and my spouse, I die: but thee, O bed,
Some other woman shall possess as wife —
Truer, no! but of better fortune, say!'
— So falls on, kisses it till all the couch
Is moistened with the eyes' sad overflow.
But when of many tears she had her fill,
She flings from off the couch, goes headlong forth,
Yet — forth the chamber — still keeps turning back
And casts her on the couch again once more.
Her children, clinging to their mother's robe,
Wept meanwhile: but she took them in her arms,

And, as a dying woman might, embraced
Now one and now the other: 'neath the roof,
All of the household servants wept as well,
Moved to compassion for their mistress; she
Extended her right hand to all and each,
And there was no one of such low degree
She spoke not to nor had an answer from.
Such are the evils in Admetos' house.
Dying, — why, he had died; but, living, gains
Such grief as this he never will forget!"
And when they questioned of Admetos, "Well —
Holding his dear wife in his hands, he weeps;
Entreats her not to give him up, and seeks
The impossible, in fine: for there she wastes
And withers by disease, abandoned now,
A mere dead weight upon her husband's arm.
Yet, none the less, although she breathe so faint,
Her will is to behold the beams o' the sun:
Since never more again, but this last once,
Shall she see sun, its circlet or its ray.
But I will go, announce your presence, — friends
Indeed; since 't is not all so love their lords
As seek them in misfortune, kind the same:
But you are the old friends I recognize."

And at the word she turned again to go:
The while they waited, taking up the plaint
To Zeus again: "What passage from this strait?
What loosing of the heavy fortune fast
About the palace? Will such help appear,
Or must we clip the locks and cast around
Each form already the black peplos' fold?
Clearly the black robe, clearly! All the same,
Pray to the Gods! — like Gods' no power so great!
O thou king Paian, find some way to save!
Reveal it, yea, reveal it! Since of old
Thou found'st a cure, why, now again become
Releaser from the bonds of Death, we beg,
And give the sanguinary Hades pause!"
So the song dwindled into a mere moan,
How dear the wife, and what her husband's woe;
When suddenly —
"Behold, behold!" breaks forth:
"Here is she coming from the house indeed!
Her husband comes, too! Cry aloud, lament,
Pheraian land, this best of women, bound —

So is she withered by disease away —
For realms below and their infernal king!
Never will we affirm there 's more of joy
Than grief in marriage; making estimate
Both from old sorrows anciently observed,
And this misfortune of the king we see —
Admetos who, of bravest spouse bereaved,
Will live life's remnant out, no life at all!"

So wailed they, while a sad procession wound
Slow from the innermost o' the palace, stopped
At the extreme verge of the platform-front:
There opened, and disclosed Alkestis' self,
The consecrated lady, borne to look
Her last — and let the living look their last —
She at the sun, we at Alkestis.
We!
For would you note a memorable thing?
We grew to see in that severe regard, —
Hear in that hard dry pressure to the point,
Word slow pursuing word in monotone, —
What Death meant when he called her consecrate
Henceforth to Hades. I believe, the sword —
Its office was to cut the soul at once
From life, — from something in this world which hides
Truth, and hides falsehood, and so lets us live
Somehow. Suppose a rider furls a cloak
About a horse's head; unfrightened, so,
Between the menace of a flame, between
Solicitation of the pasturage,
Untempted equally, he goes his gait
To journey's end: then pluck the pharos off!
Show what delusions steadied him i' the straight
O' the path, made grass seem fire and fire seem grass,
All through a little bandage o'er the eyes!
As certainly with eyes unbandaged now
Alkestis looked upon the action here,
Self-immolation for Admetos' sake;
Saw, with a new sense, all her death would do,
And which of her survivors had the right,
And which the less right, to survive thereby.
For, you shall note, she uttered no one word
Of love more to her husband, though he wept
Plenteously, waxed importunate in prayer —
Folly's old fashion when its seed bears fruit.
I think she judged that she had bought the ware

O' the seller at its value, — nor praised him
Nor blamed herself, but, with indifferent eye,
Saw him purse money up, prepare to leave
The buyer with a solitary bale —
True purple — but in place of all that coin,
Had made a hundred others happy too,
If so willed fate or fortune! What remained
To give away, should rather go to these
Than one with coin to clink and contemplate.
Admetos had his share and might depart,
The rest was for her children and herself.
(Charopé makes a face: but wait awhile!)
She saw things plain as Gods do: by one stroke
O' the sword that rends the life-long veil away.
(Also Euripides saw plain enough:
But you and I, Charopé! — you and I
Will trust his sight until our own grow clear.)

"Sun, and thou light of day, and heavenly dance
O' the fleet cloud-figure!" (so her passion paused,
While the awe-stricken husband made his moan,
Muttered now this now that ineptitude:
"Sun that sees thee and me, a suffering pair,
Who did the Gods no wrong whence thou should'st die!")
Then, as if caught up, carried in their course,
Fleeting and free as cloud and sunbeam are,
She missed no happiness that lay beneath:
"O thou wide earth, from these my palace roofs,
To distant nuptial chambers once my own
In that Iolkos of my ancestry!" —
There the flight failed her. "Raise thee, wretched one!
Give us not up! Pray pity from the Gods!"

Vainly Admetos: for "I see it — see
The two-oared boat! The ferryer of the dead,
Charon, hand hard upon the boatman's-pole,
Calls me — even now calls — 'Why delayest thou?
Quick! Thou obstructest all made ready here
For prompt departure: quick, then!'"
"Woe is me!
A bitter voyage this to undergo,
Even i' the telling! Adverse Powers above,
How do ye plague us!"
Then a shiver ran:
"He has me — seest not? — hales me, — who is it? —
To the hall o' the Dead — ah, who but Hades' self,

He, with the wings there, glares at me, one gaze
All that blue brilliance, under the eyebrow!
What wilt thou do? Unhand me! Such a way
I have to traverse, all unhappy one!"

"Way — piteous to thy friends, but, most of all,
Me and thy children: ours assuredly
A common partnership in grief like this!"

Whereat they closed about her; but "Let be!
Leave, let me lie now! Strength forsakes my feet.
Hades is here, and shadowy on my eyes
Comes the night creeping. Children — children, now
Indeed, a mother is no more for you!
Farewell, O children, long enjoy the light!"

"Ah me, the melancholy word I hear,
Oppressive beyond every kind of death!
No, by the Deities, take heart nor dare
To give me up — no, by our children too
Made orphans of! But rise, be resolute,
Since, thou departed, I no more remain!
For in thee are we bound up, to exist
Or cease to be — so we adore thy love!"

— Which brought out truth to judgment. At this word
And protestation, all the truth in her
Claimed to assert itself: she waved away
The blue-eyed black-wing'd phantom, held in check
The advancing pageantry of Hades there,
And, with no change in her own countenance,
She fixed her eyes on the protesting man,
And let her lips unlock their sentence, — so!
"Admetos, — how things go with me thou seest, —
I wish to tell thee, ere I die, what things
I will should follow. I — to honor thee,
Secure for thee, by my own soul's exchange,
Continued looking on the daylight here —
Die for thee — yet, if so I pleased, might live,
Nay, wed what man of Thessaly I would,
And dwell i' the dome with pomp and queenliness.
I would not, — would not live bereft of thee,
With children orphaned, neither shrank at all,
Though having gifts of youth wherein I joyed.
Yet, who begot thee and who gave thee birth,
Both of these gave thee up; no less, a term
Of life was reached when death became them well,

Ay, well — to save their child and glorious die :
Since thou wast all they had, nor hope remained
Of having other children in thy place.
So, I and thou had lived out our full time,
Nor thou, left lonely of thy wife, wouldst groan
With children reared in orphanage: but thus
Some God disposed things, willed they so should be.
Be they so ! Now do thou remember this,
Do me in turn a favor — favor, since
Certainly I shall never claim my due,
For nothing is more precious than a life :
But a fit favor, as thyself wilt say,
Loving our children here no less than I,
If head and heart be sound in thee at least.
Uphold them, make them masters of my house,
Nor wed and give a step-dame to the pair,
Who, being a worse wife than I, through spite
Will raise her hand against both thine and mine.
Never do this at least, I pray to thee !
For hostile the new-comer, the step-dame,
To the old brood — a very viper she
For gentleness ! Here stand they, boy and girl;
The boy has got a father, a defence
Tower-like, he speaks to and has answer from :
But thou, my girl, how will thy virginhood
Conclude itself in marriage fittingly ?
Upon what sort of sire-found yoke-fellow
Art thou to chance ? with all to apprehend —
Lest, casting on thee some unkind report,
She blast thy nuptials in the bloom of youth.
For neither shall thy mother watch thee wed,
Nor hearten thee in childbirth, standing by
Just when a mother's presence helps the most !
No, for I have to die : and this my ill
Comes to me, nor to-morrow, no, nor yet
The third day of the month, but now, even now,
I shall be reckoned among those no more.
Farewell, be happy ! And to thee, indeed,
Husband, the boast remains permissible
Thou hadst a wife was worthy ! and to you,
Children ; as good a mother gave you birth."

"Have courage!" interposed the friends. "For him
I have no scruple to declare — all this
Will he perform, except he fail of sense."

"All this shall be — shall be!" Admetos sobbed:
"Fear not! And, since I had thee living, dead
Alone wilt thou be called my wife: no fear
That some Thessalian ever styles herself
Bride, hails this man for husband in thy place!
No woman, be she of such lofty line
Or such surpassing beauty otherwise!
Enough of children: gain from these I have,
Such only may the Gods grant! since in thee
Absolute is our loss, where all was gain.
And I shall bear for thee no year-long grief,
But grief that lasts while my own days last, love!
Love! For my hate is she who bore me, now:
And him I hate, my father: loving-ones
Truly, in word not deed! But thou didst pay
All dearest to thee down, and buy my life,
Saving me so! Is there not cause enough
That I who part with such companionship
In thee, should make my moan? I moan, and more:
For I will end the feastings — social flow
O' the wine friends flock for, garlands and the Muse
That graced my dwelling. Never now for me
To touch the lyre, to lift my soul in song
At summons of the Lydian flute; since thou
From out my life hast emptied all the joy!
And this thy body, in thy likeness wrought
By some wise hand of the artificers,
Shall lie disposed within my marriage-bed:
This I will fall on, this enfold about,
Call by thy name, — my dear wife in my arms
Even though I have not, I shall seem to have —
A cold delight, indeed, but all the same
So should I lighten of its weight my soul!
And, wandering my way in dreams perchance,
Thyself wilt bless me: for, come when they will,
Even by night our loves are sweet to see.
But were the tongue and tune of Orpheus mine,
So that to Koré crying, or her lord,
In hymns, from Hades I might rescue thee —
Down would I go, and neither Plouton's dog
Nor Charon, he whose oar sends souls across,
Should stay me till again I made thee stand
Living, within the light! But, failing this,
There, where thou art, await me when I die,
Make ready our abode, my housemate still!
For in the selfsame cedar me with thee

Will I provide that these our friends shall place,
My side lay close by thy side! Never, corpse
Although I be, would I division bear
From thee, my faithful one of all the world!"

So he stood sobbing: nowise insincere,
But somehow child-like, like his children, like
Childishness the world over. What was new
In this announcement that his wife must die?
What particle of pain beyond the pact
He made, with eyes wide open, long ago —
Made and was, if not glad, content to make?
Now that the sorrow, he had called for, came,
He sorrowed to the height: none heard him say,
However, what would seem so pertinent,
"To keep this pact, I find surpass my power:
Rescind it, Moirai! Give me back her life,
And take the life I kept by base exchange!
Or, failing that, here stands your laughing-stock
Fooled by you, worthy just the fate o' the fool
Who makes a pother to escape the best
And gain the worst you wiser Powers allot!"
No, not one word of this: nor did his wife
Despite the sobbing, and the silence soon
To follow, judge so much was in his thought —
Fancy that, should the Moirai acquiesce,
He would relinquish life nor let her die.
The man was like some merchant who, in storm,
Throws the freight over to redeem the ship:
No question, saving both were better still.
As it was, — why, he sorrowed, which sufficed.
So, all she seemed to notice in his speech
Was what concerned her children. Children, too,
Bear the grief and accept the sacrifice.
Rightly rules nature: does the blossomed bough
O' the grape-vine, or the dry grape's self, bleed wine?

So, bending to her children all her love,
She fastened on their father's only word
To purpose now, and followed it with this:
"O children, now yourselves have heard these things —
Your father saying he will never wed
Another woman to be over you,
Nor yet dishonor me!"

"And now at least
I say it, and I will accomplish too!"

"Then, for such promise of accomplishment,
Take from my hand these children!"

"Thus I take —
Dear gift from the dear hand!"

"Do thou become
Mother, now, to these children in my place!"

"Great the necessity I should be so,
At least, to these bereaved of thee!"

"Child — child!
Just when I needed most to live, below
Am I departing from you both!"

"Ah me!
And what shall I do, then, left lonely thus?"

"Time will appease thee: who is dead is nought."

"Take me with thee — take, by the Gods below!"

"We are sufficient, we who die for thee."

"Oh, Powers, ye widow me of what a wife!"

"And truly the dimmed eye draws earthward now!"

"Wife, if thou leav'st me, I am lost indeed!"

"She once was — now is nothing, thou mayst say."

"Raise thy face, nor forsake thy children thus!"

"Ah, willingly indeed I leave them not!
But — fare ye well, my children!"

"Look on them —
Look!"
"I am nothingness."

"What dost thou? Leav'st . . ."
"Farewell!"
And in the breath she passed away.
"Undone — me miserable!" moaned the king,

While friends released the long-suspended sigh.
"Gone is she: no wife for Admetos more!"

Such was the signal: how the woe broke forth,
Why tell? — or how the children's tears ran fast
Bidding their father note the eyelids' stare,
Hands' droop, each dreadful circumstance of death.

"Ay, she hears not, she sees not: I and you,
'T is plain, are stricken hard and have to bear!"
Was all Admetos answered; for, I judge,
He only now began to taste the truth:
The thing done lay revealed, which undone thing,
Rehearsed for fact by fancy, at the best,
Never can equal. He had used himself
This long while (as he muttered presently)
To practise with the terms, the blow involved
By the bargain, sharp to bear, but bearable
Because of plain advantage at the end.
Now that, in fact not fancy, the blow fell —
Needs must he busy him with the surprise.
"Alkestis — not to see her nor be seen,
Hear nor be heard of by her, any more
To-day, to-morrow, to the end of time —
Did I mean this should buy my life?" thought he.

So, friends came round him, took him by the hand,
Bade him remember our mortality,
Its due, its doom: how neither was he first,
Nor would be last, to thus deplore the loved.

"I understand," slow the words came at last.
"Nor of a sudden did the evil here
Fly on me: I have known it long ago,
Ay, and essayed myself in misery;
Nothing is new. You have to stay, you friends,
Because the next need is to carry forth
The corpse here: you must stay and do your part,
Chant proper pæan to the God below;
Drink-sacrifice he likes not. I decree
That all Thessalians over whom I rule
Hold grief in common with me; let them shear
Their locks, and be the peplos black they show!
And you who to the chariot yoke your steeds,
Or manage steeds one-frontleted, — I charge,
Clip from each neck with steel the mane away!

And through my city, nor of flute nor lyre
Be there a sound till twelve full moons succeed.
For I shall never bury any corpse
Dearer than this to me, nor better friend:
One worthy of all honor from me, since
Me she has died for, she and she alone."

With that, he sought the inmost of the house,
He and his dead, to get grave's garniture,
While the friends sang the pæan that should peal.
"Daughter of Pelias, with farewell from me,
I' the house of Hades have thy unsunned home!
Let Hades know, the dark-haired deity, —
And he who sits to row and steer alike,
Old corpse-conductor, let him know he bears
Over the Acherontian lake, this time,
I' the two-oared boat, the best — oh, best by far
Of womankind! For thee, Alkestis Queen!
Many a time those haunters of the Muse
Shall sing thee to the seven-stringed mountain-shell,
And glorify in hymns that need no harp,
At Sparta when the cycle comes about,
And that Karneian month wherein the moon
Rises and never sets the whole night through:
So too at splendid and magnificent
Athenai. Such the spread of thy renown,
And such the lay that, dying, thou hast left
Singer and sayer. O that I availed
Of my own might to send thee once again
From Hades' hall, Kokutos' stream, by help
O' the oar that dips the river, back to day!"

So, the song sank to prattle in her praise:
"Light, from above thee, lady, fall the earth,
Thou only one of womankind to die,
Wife for her husband! If Admetos take
Anything to him like a second spouse —
Hate from his offspring and from us shall be
His portion, let the king assure himself!
No mind his mother had to hide in earth
Her body for her son's sake, nor his sire
Had heart to save whom he begot, — not they,
The white-haired wretches! only thou it was,
I' the bloom of youth, didst save him and so die!
Might it be mine to chance on such a mate
And partner! For there 's penury in life

Of such allowance: were she mine at least,
So wonderful a wife, assuredly
She would companion me throughout my days
And never once bring sorrow!"
A great voice —
"My hosts here!"
Oh, the thrill that ran through us!
Never was aught so good and opportune
As that great interrupting voice! For see!
Here maundered this dispirited old age
Before the palace; whence a something crept
Which told us well enough without a word
What was a-doing inside, — every touch
O' the garland on those temples, tenderest
Disposure of each arm along its side,
Came putting out what warmth i' the world was left.
Then, as it happens at a sacrifice
When, drop by drop, some lustral bath is brimmed:
Into the thin and clear and cold, at once
They slaughter a whole wine-skin; Bacchos' blood
Sets the white water all aflame: even so,
Sudden into the midst of sorrow, leapt
Along with the gay cheer of that great voice,
Hope, joy, salvation: Heraklês was here!
Himself, o' the threshold, sent his voice on first
To herald all that human and divine
I' the weary happy face of him, — half God,
Half man, which made the god-part God the more.

"Hosts mine," he broke upon the sorrow with,
"Inhabitants of this Pheraian soil,
Chance I upon Admetos inside here?"

The irresistible sound wholesome heart
O' the hero, — more than all the mightiness
At labor in the limbs that, for man's sake,
Labored and meant to labor their life-long, —
This drove back, dried up sorrow at its source.
How could it brave the happy weary laugh
Of who had bantered sorrow "Sorrow here?
What have you done to keep your friend from harm?
Could no one give the life I see he keeps?
Or, say there 's sorrow here past friendly help,
Why waste a word or let a tear escape
While other sorrows wait you in the world,
And want the life of you, though helpless here?"

Clearly there was no telling such an one
How, when their monarch tried who loved him more
Than he loved them, and found they loved, as he,
Each man, himself, and held, no otherwise,
That, of all evils in the world, the worst
Was — being forced to die, whate'er death gain:
How all this selfishness in him and them
Caused certain sorrow which they sang about, —
I think that Herakles, who held his life
Out on his hand, for any man to take —
I think his laugh had marred their threnody.

"He is in the house," they answered. After all,
They might have told the story, talked their best
About the inevitable sorrow here,
Nor changed nor checked the kindly nature, — no!
So long as men were merely weak, not bad,
He loved men: were they Gods he used to help?
"Yea, Pheres' son is in-doors, Herakles.
But say, what sends thee to Thessalian soil,
Brought by what business to this Pherai town?"

"A certain labor that I have to do
Eurustheus the Tirunthian," laughed the God.

"And whither wendest — on what wandering
Bound now?" (they had an instinct, guessed what meant
Wanderings, labors, in the God's light mouth.)

"After the Thrakian Diomedes' car
With the four horses."

"Ah, but canst thou that?
Art inexperienced in thy host to be?"

"All-inexperienced: I have never gone
As yet to the land o' the Bistones."

"Then, look
By no means to be master of the steeds
Without a battle!"

"Battle there may be:
I must refuse no labor, all the same."

"Certainly, either having slain a foe
Wilt thou return to us, or, slain thyself,
Stay there!"

"And, even if the game be so,
The risk in it were not the first I run."

"But, say thou overpower the lord o' the place,
What more advantage dost expect thereby?"

"I shall drive off his horses to the king."

"No easy handling them to bit the jaw!"

"Easy enough; except, at least, they breathe
Fire from their nostrils!"
"But they mince up men
With those quick jaws!"
"You talk of provender
For mountain-beasts, and not mere horses' food!"

"Thou mayst behold their mangers caked with gore!"

"And of what sire does he who bred them boast
Himself the son?"
"Of Ares, king o' the targe —
Thrakian, of gold throughout."
Another laugh.
"Why, just the labor, just the lot for me
Dost thou describe in what I recognize!
Since hard and harder, high and higher yet,
Truly this lot of mine is like to go
If I must needs join battle with the brood
Of Ares: ay, I fought Lukaon first,
And again, Kuknos: now engage in strife
This third time, with such horses and such lord.
But there is nobody shall ever see
Alkmenê's son shrink foemen's hand before!"

— "Or ever hear him say" (the Chorus thought)
"That death is terrible; and help us so
To chime in — 'terrible beyond a doubt,
And, if to thee, why, to ourselves much more:
Know what has happened, then, and sympathize'!"
Therefore they gladly stopped the dialogue,
Shifted the burthen to new shoulder straight,
As, "Look where comes the lord o' the land, himself,
Admetos, from the palace!" they outbroke
In some surprise, as well as much relief.
What had induced the king to waive his right

And luxury of woe in loneliness?

Out he came quietly; the hair was clipt,
And the garb sable; else no outward sign
Of sorrow as he came and faced his friend.
Was truth fast terrifying tears away?
"Hail, child of Zeus, and sprung from Perseus too!"
The salutation ran without a fault.

"And thou, Admetos, King of Thessaly!"

"Would, as thou wishest me, the grace might fall!
But my good-wisher, that thou art, I know."

"What's here? these shorn locks, this sad show of thee?"

"I must inter a certain corpse to-day."

"Now, from thy children God avert mischance!"

"They live, my children; all are in the house!"

"Thy father — if 't is he departs indeed,
His age was ripe at least."

"My father lives,
And she who bore me lives too, Herakles."

"It cannot be thy wife Alkestis gone?"

"Twofold the tale is, I can tell of her."

"Dead dost thou speak of her, or living yet?"

"She is — and is not: hence the pain to me!"

"I learn no whit the more, so dark thy speech!"

"Know'st thou not on what fate she needs must fall?"

"I know she is resigned to die for thee."

"How lives she still, then, if submitting so?"

"Eh, weep her not beforehand! wait till then!"

"Who is to die is dead; doing is done."

"To be and not to be are thought diverse."

"Thou judgest this — I, that way, Herakles!"

"Well, but declare what causes thy complaint!
Who is the man has died from out thy friends?"

"No man: I had a woman in my mind."

"Alien, or some one born akin to thee?"

"Alien: but still related to my house."

"How did it happen then that here she died?"

"Her father dying left his orphan here."

"Alas, Admetos — would we found thee gay,
Not grieving!"
"What as if about to do
Subjoinest thou that comment?"
"I shall seek
Another hearth, proceed to other hosts."

"Never, O king, shall that be! No such ill
Betide me!"
"Nay, to mourners should there come
A guest, he proves importunate!"
"The dead —
Dead are they: but go thou within my house!"

"'T is base carousing beside friends who mourn."

"The guest-rooms, whither we shall lead thee, lie
Apart from ours."
"Nay, let me go my way!
Ten-thousandfold the favor I shall thank!"

"It may not be thou goest to the hearth
Of any man but me!" so made an end
Admetos, softly and decisively,
Of the altercation. Herakles forbore:
And the king bade a servant lead the way,
Open the guest-rooms ranged remote from view
O' the main hall, tell the functionaries, next,

They had to furnish forth a plenteous feast:
And then shut close the doors o' the hall, midway,
"Because it is not proper friends who feast
Should hear a groaning or be grieved," quoth he.

Whereat the hero, who was truth itself,
Let out the smile again, repressed awhile
Like fountain-brilliance one forbids to play.
He did too many grandnesses, to note
Much in the meaner things about his path:
And stepping there, with face towards the sun,
Stopped seldom to pluck weeds or ask their names.
Therefore he took Admetos at the word:
This trouble must not hinder any more
A true heart from good will and pleasant ways.
And so, the great arm, which had slain the snake,
Strained his friend's head a moment in embrace
On that broad breast beneath the lion's hide,
Till the king's cheek winced at the thick rough gold;
And then strode off, with who had care of him,
To the remote guest-chamber: glad to give
Poor flesh and blood their respite and relief
In the interval 'twixt fight and fight again —
All for the world's sake. Our eyes followed him,
Be sure, till those mid-doors shut us outside.
The king, too, watched great Herakles go off
All faith, love, and obedience to a friend.

And when they questioned him, the simple ones,
"What dost thou? Such calamity to face,
Lies full before thee — and thou art so bold
As play the host, Admetos? Hast thy wits?"
He replied calmly to each chiding tongue:
"But if from house and home I forced away
A coming guest, wouldst thou have praised me more?
No, truly! since calamity were mine,
Nowise diminished; while I showed myself
Unhappy and inhospitable too:
So adding to my ills this other ill,
That mine were styled a stranger-hating house.
Myself have ever found this man the best
Of entertainers when I went his way
To parched and thirsty Argos."
"If so be —
Why didst thou hide what destiny was here,
When one came that was kindly, as thou say'st?"

"He never would have willed to cross my door
Had he known aught of my calamities.
And probably to some of you I seem
Unwise enough in doing what I do;
Such will scarce praise me: but these halls of mine
Know not to drive off and dishonor guests."

And so, the duty done, he turned once more
To go and busy him about his dead.
As for the sympathizers left to muse,
There was a change, a new light thrown on things,
Contagion from the magnanimity
O' the man whose life lay on his hand so light,
As up he stepped, pursuing duty still
"Higher and harder," as he laughed and said.
Somehow they found no folly now in the act
They blamed erewhile: Admetos' private grief
Shrank to a somewhat pettier obstacle
I' the way o' the world: they saw good days had been,
And good days, peradventure, still might be,
Now that they overlooked the present cloud
Heavy upon the palace opposite.
And soon the thought took words and music thus: —

"Harbor of many a stranger, free to friend,
Ever and always, O thou house o' the man
We mourn for! Thee, Apollon's very self,
The lyric Puthian, deigned inhabit once,
Become a shepherd here in thy domains,
And pipe, adown the winding hillside paths,
Pastoral marriage-poems to thy flocks
At feed: while with them fed in fellowship,
Through joy i' the music, spot-skin lynxes; ay,
And lions too, the bloody company,
Came, leaving Othrus' dell; and round thy lyre,
Phoibos, there danced the speckle-coated fawn,
Pacing on lightsome fetlock past the pines
Tress-topped, the creature's natural boundary,
Into the open everywhere; such heart
Had she within her, beating joyous beats,
At the sweet reassurance of thy song!
Therefore the lot o' the master is, to live
In a home multitudinous with herds,
Along by the fair-flowing Boibian lake,
Limited, that ploughed land and pasture-plain,
Only where stand the sun's steeds, stabled west
I' the cloud, by that mid-air which makes the clime

Of those Molossoi: and he rules as well
O'er the Aigaian, up to Pelion's shore, —
Sea-stretch without a port! Such lord have we:
And here he opens house now, as of old,
Takes to the heart of it a guest again:
Though moist the eyelid of the master, still
Mourning his dear wife's body, dead but now!"

And they admired: nobility of soul
Was self-impelled to reverence, they saw:
The best men ever prove the wisest too:
Something instinctive guides them still aright.
And on each soul this boldness settled now,
That one who reverenced the Gods so much
Would prosper yet: (or — I could wish it ran —
Who venerates the Gods i' the main will still
Practise things honest though obscure to judge.)

They ended, for Admetos entered now;
Having disposed all duteously indoors,
He came into the outside world again,
Quiet as ever: but a quietude
Bent on pursuing its descent to truth,
As who must grope until he gain the ground
O' the dungeon doomed to be his dwelling now.
Already high o'er head was piled the dusk,
When something pushed to stay his downward step,
Pluck back despair just reaching its repose.
He would have bidden the kind presence there
Observe that, — since the corpse was coming out,
Cared for in all things that befit the case,
Carried aloft, in decency and state,
To the last burial-place and burning pile, —
'T were proper friends addressed, as custom prompts,
Alkestis bound on her last journeying.

"Ay, for we see thy father," they subjoined,
"Advancing as the aged foot best may;
His servants, too: each bringing in his hand
Adornments for thy wife, all pomp that 's due
To the downward-dwelling people." And in truth,
By slow procession till they filled the stage,
Came Pheres, and his following, and their gifts.
You see, the worst of the interruption was,
It plucked back, with an over-hasty hand,
Admetos from descending to the truth,

(I told you) — put him on the brink again,
Full i' the noise and glare where late he stood:
With no fate fallen and irrevocable,
But all things subject still to chance and change:
And that chance — life, and that change — happiness.
And with the low strife came the little mind:
He was once more the man might gain so much,
Life too and wife too, would his friends but help!
All he felt now was that there faced him one
Supposed the likeliest, in emergency,
To help: and help, by mere self-sacrifice
So natural, it seemed as if the sire
Must needs lie open still to argument,
Withdraw the rash decision, not to die
But rather live, though death would save his son: —
Argument like the ignominious grasp
O' the drowner whom his fellow grasps as fierce,
Each marvelling that the other needs must hold
Head out of water, though friend choke thereby.

And first the father's salutation fell.
Burthened he came, in common with his child,
Who lost, none would gainsay, a good chaste spouse:
Yet such things must be borne, though hard to bear.
"So, take this tribute of adornment, deep
In the earth let it descend along with her!
Behooves we treat the body with respect
— Of one who died, at least, to save thy life,
Kept me from being childless, nor allowed
That I, bereft of thee, should peak and pine
In melancholy age! she, for the sex,
All of her sisters, put in evidence,
By daring such a feat, that female life
Might prove more excellent than men suppose.
O thou Alkestis!" out he burst in fine,
"Who, while thou savedst this my son, didst raise
Also myself from sinking, — hail to thee!
Well be it with thee even in the house
Of Hades! I maintain, if mortals must
Marry, this sort of marriage is the sole
Permitted those among them who are wise!"

So his oration ended. Like hates like:
Accordingly Admetos, — full i' the face
Of Pheres, his true father, outward shape
And inward fashion, body matching soul, —

Saw just himself when years should do their work
And reinforce the selfishness inside
Until it pushed the last disguise away:
As when the liquid metal cools i' the mould,
Stands forth a statue: bloodless, hard, cold bronze.
So, in old Pheres, young Admetos showed,
Pushed to completion: and a shudder ran,
And his repugnance soon had vent in speech:
Glad to escape outside, nor, pent within,
Find itself there fit food for exercise.

"Neither to this interment called by me
Comest thou, nor thy presence I account
Among the covetable proofs of love.
As for thy tribute of adornment, — no!
Ne'er shall she don it, ne'er in debt to thee
Be buried! What is thine, that keep thou still!
Then it behooved thee to commiserate
When I was perishing: but thou — who stood'st
Foot-free o' the snare, wast acquiescent then
That I, the young, should die, not thou, the old —
Wilt thou lament this corpse thyself hast slain?
Thou wast not, then, true father to this flesh;
Nor she, who makes profession of my birth
And styles herself my mother, neither she
Bore me: but, come of slave's blood, I was cast
Stealthily 'neath the bosom of thy wife!
Thou showedst, put to touch, the thing thou art,
Nor I esteem myself born child of thee!
Otherwise, thine is the preëminence
O'er all the world in cowardice of soul:
Who, being the old man thou art, arrived
Where life should end, didst neither will nor dare
Die for thy son, but left the task to her,
The alien woman, whom I well might think
Own, only mother both and father too!
And yet a fair strife had been thine to strive,
— Dying for thy own child; and brief for thee
In any case, the rest of time to live;
While I had lived, and she, our rest of time,
Nor I been left to groan in solitude.
Yet certainly all things which happy man
Ought to experience, thy experience grasped.
Thou wast a ruler through the bloom of youth,
And I was son to thee, recipient due
Of sceptre and demesne, — no need to fear
That dying thou shouldst leave an orphan house

For strangers to despoil. Nor yet wilt thou
Allege that as dishonoring, forsooth,
Thy length of days, I gave thee up to die, —
I, who have held thee in such reverence!
And in exchange for it, such gratitude
Thou, father, — thou award'st me, mother mine!
Go, lose no time, then, in begetting sons
Shall cherish thee in age, and, when thou diest,
Deck up and lay thee out as corpses claim!
For never I, at least, with this my hand
Will bury thee: it is myself am dead
So far as lies in thee. But if I light
Upon another savior, and still see
The sunbeam, — his, the child I call myself,
His, the old age that claims my cherishing.
How vainly do these aged pray for death,
Abuse the slow drag of senility!
But should death step up, nobody inclines
To die, nor age is now the weight it was!"

You see what all this poor pretentious talk
Tried at, — how weakness strove to hide itself
In bluster against weakness, — the loud word
To hide the little whisper, not so low
Already in that heart beneath those lips!
Ha, could it be, who hated cowardice
Stood confessed craven, and who lauded so
Self-immolating love, himself had pushed
The loved one to the altar in his place?
Friends interposed, would fain stop further play
O' the sharp-edged tongue: they felt love's champion here
Had left an undefended point or two,
The antagonist might profit by; bade "Pause!
Enough the present sorrow! Nor, O son,
Whet thus against thyself thy father's soul!"

Ay, but old Pheres was the stouter stuff!
Admetos, at the flintiest of the heart,
Had so much soft in him as held a fire:
The other was all iron, clashed from flint
Its fire, but shed no spark and showed no bruise.
Did Pheres crave instruction as to facts?
He came, content, the ignoble word, for him,
Should lurk still in the blackness of each breast,
As sleeps the water-serpent half-surmised:
Not brought up to the surface at a bound,
By one touch of the idly-probing spear,

Reed-like against unconquerable scale.
He came pacific, rather, as strength should,
Bringing the decent praise, the due regret,
And each banality prescribed of old.
Did he commence "Why let her die for you?"
And rouse the coiled and quiet ugliness
"What is so good to man as man's own life?"
No: but the other did: and, for his pains,
Out, full in face of him, the venom leapt.

"And whom dost thou make bold, son — Ludian slave,
Or Phrugian whether, money made thy ware,
To drive at with revilings? Know'st thou not
I, a Thessalian, from Thessalian sire
Spring and am born legitimately free?
Too arrogant art thou; and, youngster words
Casting against me, having had thy fling,
Thou goest not off as all were ended so!
I gave thee birth indeed and mastership
I' the mansion, brought thee up to boot: there ends
My owing, nor extends to die for thee!
Never did I receive it as a law
Hereditary, no, nor Greek at all,
That sires in place of sons were bound to die.
For, to thy sole and single self wast thou
Born, with whatever fortune, good or bad;
Such things as bear bestowment, those thou hast;
Already ruling widely, broad lands, too,
Doubt not but I shall leave thee in due time:
For why? My father left me them before.
Well then, where wrong I thee? — of what defraud?
Neither do thou die for this man, myself,
Nor let him die for thee! — is all I beg.
Thou joyest seeing daylight: dost suppose
Thy father joys not too? Undoubtedly,
Long I account the time to pass below,
And brief my span of days; yet sweet the same:
Is it otherwise to thee who, impudent,
Didst fight off this same death, and livest now
Through having sneaked past fate apportioned thee,
And slain thy wife so? Cryest cowardice
On me, I wonder, thou — whom, poor poltroon,
A very woman worsted, daring death
Just for the sake of thee, her handsome spark?
Shrewdly hast thou contrived how not to die
Forevermore now: 't is but still persuade

The wife, for the time being, to take thy place!
What, and thy friends who would not do the like,
These dost thou carp at, craven thus thyself?
Crouch and be silent, craven! Comprehend
That, if thou lovest so that life of thine,
Why, everybody loves his own life too:
So, good words, henceforth! If thou speak us ill,
Many and true an ill thing shalt thou hear!"

There you saw leap the hydra at full length!
Only, the old kept glorying the more,
The more the portent thus uncoiled itself,
Whereas the young man shuddered head to foot,
And shrank from kinship with the creature. Why
Such horror, unless what he hated most,
Vaunting itself outside, might fairly claim
Acquaintance with the counterpart at home?
I would the Chorus here had plucked up heart,
Spoken out boldly and explained the man,
If not to men, to Gods. That way, I think,
Sophokles would have led their dance and song.
Here, they said simply, "Too much evil spoke
On both sides!" As the young before, so now
They bade the old man leave abusing thus.

"Let him speak,—I have spoken!" said the youth:
And so died out the wrangle by degrees,
In wretched bickering. "If thou wince at fact,
Behoved thee not prove faulty to myself!"

"Had I died for thee I had faulted more!"

"All 's one, then, for youth's bloom and age to die?"

"Our duty is to live one life, not two!"

"Go then, and outlive Zeus, for aught I care!"

"What, curse thy parents with no sort of cause?"

"Curse, truly! All thou lovest is long life!"

"And dost not thou, too, all for love of life,
Carry out now, in place of thine, this corpse?"

"Monument, rather, of thy cowardice,
Thou worst one!"

"Not for me she died, I hope!
That, thou wilt hardly say!"
"No; simply this:
Would, some day, thou mayst come to need myself!"

"Meanwhile, woo many wives — the more will die!"

"And so shame thee who never dared the like!"

"Dear is this light o' the sun-god — dear, I say!"

"Proper conclusion for a beast to draw!"

"One thing is certain: there 's no laughing now,
As out thou bearest the poor dead old man!"

"Die when thou wilt, thou wilt die infamous!"

"And once dead, whether famed or infamous,
I shall not care!"
"Alas and yet again!
How full is age of impudency!"
"True!
Thou couldst not call thy young wife impudent:
She was found foolish merely."
"Get thee gone!
And let me bury this my dead!"
"I go.
Thou buriest her whom thou didst murder first;
Whereof there 's some account to render yet
Those kinsfolk by the marriage-side! I think,
Brother Akastos may be classed with me,
Among the beasts, not men, if he omit
Avenging upon thee his sister's blood!"

"Go to perdition, with thy housemate too!
Grow old all childlessly, with child alive,
Just as ye merit! for to me, at least,
Beneath the same roof ne'er do ye return.
And did I need by heralds' help renounce
The ancestral hearth, I had renounced the same!
But we — since this woe, lying at our feet
I' the path, is to be borne — let us proceed
And lay the body on the pyre."
I think,
What, through this wretched wrangle, kept the man

From seeing clear — beside the cause I gave —
Was, that the woe, himself described as full
I' the path before him, there did really lie —
Not roll into the abyss of dead and gone.
How, with Alkestis present, calmly crowned,
Was she so irrecoverable yet —
The bird, escaped, that 's just on bough above,
The flower, let flutter half-way down the brink?
Not so detached seemed lifelessness from life
But — one dear stretch beyond all straining yet —
And he might have her at his heart once more,
When, in the critical minute, up there comes
The father and the fact, to trifle time!
"To the pyre!" an instinct prompted: pallid face,
And passive arm and pointed foot, when these
No longer shall absorb the sight, O friends,
Admetos will begin to see indeed
Who the true foe was, where the blows should fall!

So, the old selfish Pheres went his way,
Case-hardened as he came; and left the youth,
(Only half selfish now, since sensitive)
To go on learning by a light the more,
As friends moved off, renewing dirge the while:

"Unhappy in thy daring! Noble dame,
Best of the good, farewell! With favoring face
May Hermes the infernal, Hades too,
Receive thee! And if there, — ay, there, — some touch
Of further dignity await the good,
Sharing with them, mayst thou sit throned by her
The Bride of Hades, in companionship!"

Wherewith, the sad procession wound away,
Made slowly for the suburb sepulchre.
And lo, — while still one's heart, in time and tune,
Paced after that symmetric step of Death
Mute-marching, to the mind's eye, at the head
O' the mourners — one hand pointing out their path
With the long pale terrific sword we saw,
The other leading, with grim tender grace,
Alkestis quieted and consecrate, —
Lo, life again knocked laughing at the door!
The world goes on, goes ever, in and through,
And out again o' the cloud. We faced about,
Fronted the palace where the mid-hall-gate

Opened — not half, nor half of half, perhaps —
Yet wide enough to let out light and life,
And warmth, and bounty, and hope, and joy, at once.
Festivity burst wide, fruit rare and ripe
Crushed in the mouth of Bacchos, pulpy-prime,
All juice and flavor, save one single seed
Duly ejected from the God's nice lip,
Which lay o' the red edge, blackly visible —
To wit, a certain ancient servitor:
On whom the festal jaws o' the palace shut,
So, there he stood, a much-bewildered man.
Stupid? Nay, but sagacious in a sort:
Learned, life-long, i' the first outside of things,
Though bat for blindness to what lies beneath
And needs a nail-scratch ere 't is laid you bare.
This functionary was the trusted one
We saw deputed by Admetos late
To lead in Herakles and help him, soul
And body, to such snatched repose, snapped-up
Sustainment, as might do away the dust
O' the last encounter, knit each nerve anew
For that next onset sure to come at cry
O' the creature next assailed, — nay, should it prove
Only the creature that came forward now
To play the critic upon Herakles!

"Many the guests" — so he soliloquized
In musings burdensome to breast before,
When it seemed not too prudent tongue should wag —
"Many, and from all quarters of this world,
The guests I now have known frequent our house,
For whom I spread the banquet; but than this,
Never a worse one did I yet receive
At the hearth here! One who seeing, first of all,
The master's sorrow, entered gate the same,
And had the hardihood to house himself.
Did things stop there! But, modest by no means,
He took what entertainment lay to hand,
Knowing of our misfortune, — did we fail
In aught of the fit service, urged us serve
Just as a guest expects! And in his hands
Taking the ivied goblet, drinks and drinks
The unmixed product of black mother-earth,
Until the blaze o' the wine went round about
And warmed him: then he crowns with myrtle sprigs
His head, and howls discordance — twofold lay
Was thereupon for us to listen to —

This fellow singing, namely, nor restrained
A jot by sympathy with sorrows here —
While we o' the household mourned our mistress — mourned,
That is to say, in silence — never showed
The eyes, which we kept wetting, to the guest —
For there Admetos was imperative.
And so, here am I helping make at home
A guest, some fellow ripe for wickedness,
Robber or pirate, while she goes her way
Out of our house: and neither was it mine
To follow in procession, nor stretch forth
Hand, wave my lady dear a last farewell,
Lamenting who to me and all of us
Domestics was a mother: myriad harms
She used to ward away from every one,
And mollify her husband's ireful mood.
I ask then, do I justly hate or no
This guest, this interloper on our grief?"

"Hate him and justly!" Here 's the proper judge
Of what is due to the house from Herakles!
This man of much experience saw the first
O' the feeble duckings-down at destiny,
When King Admetos went his rounds, poor soul,
A-begging somebody to be so brave
As die for one afraid to die himself —
"Thou, friend? Thou, love? Father or mother, then!
None of you? What, Alkestis must Death catch?
O best of wives, one woman in the world!
But nowise droop: our prayers may still assist:
Let us try sacrifice; if those avail
Nothing and Gods avert their countenance,
Why, deep and durable our grief will be!"
Whereat the house, this worthy at its head,
Re-echoed "deep and durable our grief!"
This sage, who justly hated Herakles,
Did he suggest once "Rather I than she!"
Admonish the Turannos — "Be a man!
Bear thine own burden, never think to thrust
Thy fate upon another and thy wife!
It were a dubious gain could death be doomed
That other, and no passionatest plea
Of thine, to die instead, have force with fate;
Seeing thou lov'st Alkestis: what were life
Unlighted by the loved one? But to live —
Not merely live unsolaced by some thought,

Some word so poor — yet solace all the same —
As 'Thou i' the sepulchre, Alkestis, say!
Would I, or would not I, to save thy life,
Die, and die on, and die forevermore?'
No! but to read red-written up and down
The world 'This is the sunshine, this the shade,
This is some pleasure of earth, sky or sea,
Due to that other, dead that thou mayst live!'
Such were a covetable gain to thee?
Go die, fool, and be happy while 't is time!"
One word of counsel in this kind, methinks,
Had fallen to better purpose than Ai, ai,
Pheu, pheu, e, papai, and a pother of praise
O' the best, best, best one! Nothing was to hate
In King Admetos, Pheres, and the rest
O' the household down to his heroic self!
This was the one thing hateful: Herakles
Had flung into the presence, frank and free,
Out from the labor into the repose,
Ere out again and over head and ears
I' the heart of labor, all for love of men:
Making the most o' the minute, that the soul
And body, strained to height a minute since,
Might lie relaxed in joy, this breathing-space,
For man's sake more than ever; till the bow,
Restrung o' the sudden, at first cry for help,
Should send some unimaginable shaft
True to the aim and shatteringly through
The plate-mail of a monster, save man so.
He slew the pest o' the marish yesterday:
To-morrow he would bit the flame-breathed stud
That fed on man's-flesh: and this day between —
Because he held it natural to die,
And fruitless to lament a thing past cure,
So, took his fill of food, wine, song and flowers,
Till the new labor claimed him soon enough, —
"Hate him and justly!"

True, Charopé mine!
The man surmised not Herakles lay hid
I' the guest; or, knowing it, was ignorant
That still his lady lived — for Herakles;
Or else judged lightness needs must indicate
This or the other caitiff quality:
And therefore — had been right if not so wrong!
For who expects the sort of him will scratch
A nail's depth, scrape the surface just to see
What peradventure underlies the same?

So, he stood petting up his puny hate,
Parent-wise, proud of the ill-favored babe.
Not long! A great hand, careful lest it crush,
Startled him on the shoulder: up he stared,
And over him, who stood but Herakles!
There smiled the mighty presence, all one smile
And no touch more of the world-weary God,
Through the brief respite. Just a garland's grace
About the brow, a song to satisfy
Head, heart and breast, and trumpet-lips at once,
A solemn draught of true religious wine,
And — how should I know? — half a mountain-goat
Torn up and swallowed down, — the feast was fierce
But brief: all cares and pains took wing and flew,
Leaving the hero ready to begin
And help mankind, whatever woe came next,
Even though what came next should be nought more
Than the mean querulous mouth o' the man, remarked
Pursing its grievance up till patience failed
And the sage needs must rush out, as we saw,
To sulk outside and pet his hate in peace.
By no means would the Helper have it so:
He who was just about to handle brutes
In Thrace, and bit the jaws which breathed the flame, —
Well, if a good laugh and a jovial word
Could bridle age which blew bad humors forth,
That were a kind of help, too!
"Thou, there!" hailed
This grand benevolence the ungracious one —
"Why look'st so solemn and so thought-absorbed?
To guests a servant should not sour-faced be,
But do the honors with a mind urbane.
While thou, contrariwise, beholding here
Arrive thy master's comrade, hast for him
A churlish visage, all one beetle-brow —
Having regard to grief that 's out-of-door!
Come hither, and so get to grow more wise!
Things mortal — know'st the nature that they have?
No, I imagine! whence could knowledge spring?
Give ear to me, then! For all flesh to die,
Is Nature's due; nor is there any one
Of mortals with assurance he shall last
The coming morrow: for, what 's born of chance
Invisibly proceeds the way it will,
Not to be learned, no fortune-teller's prize.
This, therefore, having heard and known through me,

Gladden thyself! Drink! Count the day-by-day
Existence thine, and all the other — chance!
Ay, and pay homage also to by far
The sweetest of divinities for man,
Kupris! Benignant Goddess will she prove!
But as for aught else, leave and let things be!
And trust my counsel, if I seem to speak
To purpose — as I do, apparently.
Wilt not thou, then, — discarding overmuch
Mournfulness, do away with this shut door,
Come drink along with me, be-garlanded
This fashion? Do so, and — I well know what —
From this stern mood, this shrunk-up state of mind,
The pit-pat fall o' the flagon-juice down throat,
Soon will dislodge thee from bad harborage!
Men being mortal should think mortal-like:
Since to your solemn, brow-contracting sort,
All of them, — so I lay down law at least, —
Life is not truly life but misery."

Whereto the man with softened surliness.
"We know as much: but deal with matters, now,
Hardly befitting mirth and revelry."

"No intimate, this woman that is dead:
Mourn not too much! For, those o' the house itself,
Thy masters live, remember!"

"Live indeed?
Ah, thou know'st nought o' the woe within these walls!"

"I do — unless thy master spoke me false
Somehow!"

"Ay, ay, too much he loves a guest,
Too much, that master mine!" so muttered he.

"Was it improper he should treat me well,
Because an alien corpse was in the way?"

"No alien, but most intimate indeed!"

"Can it be, some woe was, he told me not?"

"Farewell and go thy way! Thy cares for thee —
To us, our master's sorrow is a care."

"This word begins no tale of alien woe!"

"Had it been other woe than intimate,
I could have seen thee feast, nor felt amiss."

"What! have I suffered strangely from my host?"

"Thou cam'st not at a fit reception-time:
With sorrow here beforehand: and thou seest
Shorn hair, black robes."
"But who is it that 's dead?
Some child gone? or the aged sire perhaps?"

"Admetos' wife, then! she has perished, guest!"

"How sayest? And did ye house me, all the same?"

"Ay: for he had thee in that reverence
He dared not turn thee from his door away!"

"O hapless, and bereft of what a mate!"

"All of us now are dead, not she alone!"

"But I divined it! seeing, as I did,
His eye that ran with tears, his close-clipt hair,
His countenance! Though he persuaded me,
Saying it was a stranger's funeral
He went with to the grave: against my wish,
He forced on me that I should enter doors,
Drink in the hall o' the hospitable man
Circumstanced so! And do I revel yet
With wreath on head? But — thou to hold thy peace,
Nor tell me what a woe oppressed my friend!
Where is he gone to bury her? Where am I
To go and find her?"
"By the road that leads
Straight to Larissa, thou wilt see the tomb,
Out of the suburb, a carved sepulchre."

So said he, and therewith dismissed himself
Inside to his lamenting: somewhat soothed,
However, that he had adroitly spoilt
The mirth of the great creature: oh, he marked
The movement of the mouth, how lip pressed lip,
And either eye forgot to shine, as, fast,
He plucked the chaplet from his forehead, dashed
The myrtle-sprays down, trod them underfoot!

And all the joy and wonder of the wine
Withered away, like fire from off a brand
The wind blows over — beacon though it be,
Whose merry ardor only meant to make
Somebody all the better for its blaze,
And save lost people in the dark: quenched now!

Not long quenched! As the flame, just hurried off
The brand's edge, suddenly renews its bite,
Tasting some richness caked i' the core o' the tree, —
Pine, with a blood that 's oil, — and triumphs up
Pillar-wise to the sky and saves the world:
So, in a spasm and splendor of resolve,
All at once did the God surmount the man.

"O much-enduring heart and hand of mine!
Now show what sort of son she bore to Zeus,
That daughter of Elektruon, Tiruns' child,
Alkmené! for that son must needs save now
The just-dead lady: ay, establish here
I' the house again Alkestis, bring about
Comfort and succor to Admetos so!
I will go lie in wait for Death, black-stoled
King of the corpses! I shall find him, sure,
Drinking, beside the tomb, o' the sacrifice:
And if I lie in ambuscade, and leap
Out of my lair, and seize — encircle him
Till one hand join the other round about —
There lives not who shall pull him out from me,
Rib-mauled, before he let the woman go!
But even say I miss the booty, — say,
Death comes not to the boltered blood, — why then,
Down go I, to the unsunned dwelling-place
Of Koré and the king there, — make demand,
Confident I shall bring Alkestis back,
So as to put her in the hands of him
My host, that housed me, never drove me off:
Though stricken with sore sorrow, hid the stroke,
Being a noble heart and honoring me!
Who of Thessalians, more than this man, loves
The stranger? Who, that now inhabits Greece?
Wherefore he shall not say the man was vile
Whom he befriended, — native noble heart!"

So, one look upward, as if Zeus might laugh
Approval of his human progeny, —

One summons of the whole magnific frame,
Each sinew to its service, — up he caught,
And over shoulder cast, the lion-shag,
Let the club go, — for had he not those hands?
And so went striding off, on that straight way
Leads to Larissa and the suburb tomb.
Gladness be with thee, Helper of our world!
I think this is the authentic sign and seal
Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad,
And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts
Into a rage to suffer for mankind,
And recommence at sorrow: drops like seed
After the blossom, ultimate of all.
Say, does the seed scorn earth and seek the sun?
Surely it has no other end and aim
Than to drop, once more die into the ground,
Taste cold and darkness and oblivion there:
And thence rise, tree-like grow through pain to joy,
More joy and most joy, — do man good again.

So, to the struggle off strode Herakles.
When silence closed behind the lion-garb,
Back came our dull fact settling in its place,
Though heartiness and passion half-dispersed
The inevitable fate. And presently
In came the mourners from the funeral,
One after one, until we hoped the last
Would be Alkestis and so end our dream.
Could they have really left Alkestis lone
I' the wayside sepulchre! Home, all save she!
And when Admetos felt that it was so,
By the stand-still: when he lifted head and face
From the two hiding hands and peplos' fold,
And looked forth, knew the palace, knew the hills,
Knew the plains, knew the friendly frequence there,
And no Alkestis any more again,
Why, the whole woe billow-like broke on him.

"O hateful entry, hateful countenance
O' the widowed halls!" — he moaned. "What was to be?
Go there? Stay here? Speak, not speak? All was now
Mad and impossible alike; one way
And only one was sane and safe — to die:
Now he was made aware how dear is death,
How lovable the dead are, how the heart
Yearns in us to go hide where they repose,

When we find sunbeams do no good to see,
Nor earth rests rightly where our footsteps fall.
His wife had been to him the very pledge,
Sun should be sun, earth — earth; the pledge was robbed,
Pact broken, and the world was left no world."
He stared at the impossible, mad life:
Stood, while they urged "Advance — advance! Go deep
Into the utter dark, thy palace-core!"
They tried what they called comfort, "touched the quick
Of the ulceration in his soul," he said,
With memories, — "once thy joy was thus and thus!"
True comfort were to let him fling himself
Into the hollow grave o' the tomb, and so
Let him lie dead along with all he loved.

One bade him note that his own family
Boasted a certain father whose sole son,
Worthy bewailment, died: and yet the sire
Bore stoutly up against the blow and lived;
For all that he was childless now, and prone
Already to gray hairs, far on in life.
Could such a good example miss effect?
Why fix foot, stand so, staring at the house,
Why not go in, as that wise kinsman would?

"O that arrangement of the house I know!
How can I enter, how inhabit thee
Now that one cast of fortune changes all?
Oh me, for much divides the then from now!
Then — with those pine-tree torches, Pelian pomp
And marriage-hymns, I entered, holding high
The hand of my dear wife; while many-voiced
The revelry that followed me and her
That 's dead now, — friends felicitating both,
As who were lofty-lineaged, each of us
Born of the best, two wedded and made one;
Now — wail is wedding-chant's antagonist,
And, for white peplos, stoles in sable state
Herald my way to the deserted couch!"

The one word more they ventured was, "This grief
Befell thee witless of what sorrow means,
Close after prosperous fortune: but, reflect!
Thou hast saved soul and body. Dead, thy wife —
Living, the love she left. What 's novel here?
Many the man, from whom Death long ago
Loosed the life-partner!"

Then Admetos spoke:
Turned on the comfort, with no tears, this time.
He was beginning to be like his wife.
I told you of that pressure to the point,
Word slow pursuing word in monotone,
Alkestis spoke with; so Admetos, now,
Solemnly bore the burden of the truth.
And as the voice of him grew, gathered strength,
And groaned on, and persisted to the end,
We felt how deep had been descent in grief,
And with what change he came up now to light,
And left behind such littleness as tears.

"Friends, I account the fortune of my wife
Happier than mine, though it seem otherwise:
For, her indeed no grief will ever touch,
And she from many a labor pauses now,
Renowned one! Whereas I, who ought not live,
But do live, by evading destiny,
Sad life am I to lead, I learn at last!
For how shall I bear going in-doors here?
Accosting whom? By whom saluted back,
Shall I have joyous entry? Whither turn?
Inside, the solitude will drive me forth,
When I behold the empty bed — my wife's —
The seat she used to sit upon, the floor
Unsprinkled as when dwellers loved the cool,
The children that will clasp my knees about,
Cry for their mother back: these servants too
Moaning for what a guardian they have lost!
Inside my house such circumstance awaits.
Outside, — Thessalian people's marriage-feasts
And gatherings for talk will harass me,
With overflow of women everywhere;
It is impossible I look on them —
Familiars of my wife and just her age!
And then, whoever is a foe of mine,
And lights on me — why, this will be his word —
'See there! alive ignobly, there he skulks
That played the dastard when it came to die,
And, giving her he wedded, in exchange,
Kept himself out of Hades safe and sound,
The coward! Do you call that creature — man?
He hates his parents for declining death,
Just as if he himself would gladly die!'
This sort of reputation shall I have,

Beside the other ills enough in store.
Ill-famed, ill-faring, — what advantage, friends,
Do you perceive I gain by life for death?"
That was the truth. Vexed waters sank to smooth:
'T was only when the last of bubbles broke,
The latest circlet widened all away
And left a placid level, that up swam
To the surface the drowned truth, in dreadful change.
So, through the quiet and submission, — ay,
Spite of some strong words — (for you miss the tone)
The grief was getting to be infinite —
Grief, friends fell back before. Their office shrank
To that old solace of humanity —
"Being born mortal, bear grief! Why born else?"
And they could only meditate anew.

"They, too, upborne by airy help of song,
And haply science, which can find the stars,
Had searched the heights: had sounded depths as well
By catching much at books where logic lurked,
Yet nowhere found they aught could overcome
Necessity: not any medicine served,
Which Thrakian tablets treasure, Orphic voice
Wrote itself down upon: nor remedy
Which Phoibos gave to the Asklepiadai;
Cutting the roots of many a virtuous herb
To solace overburdened mortals. None!
Of this sole goddess, never may we go
To altar nor to image: sacrifice
She hears not. All to pray for is — 'Approach!
But, oh, no harder on me, awful one,
Than heretofore! Let life endure thee still!
For, whatsoe'er Zeus' nod decree, that same
In concert with thee hath accomplishment.
Iron, the very stuff o' the Chaluboi,
Thou, by sheer strength, dost conquer and subdue;
Nor, of that harsh abrupt resolve of thine,
Any relenting is there!'
"O my king!
Thee also, in the shackles of those hands,
Not to be shunned, the Goddess grasped! Yet, bear!
Since never wilt thou lead from underground
The dead ones, wail thy worst! If mortals die, —
The very children of immortals, too,
Dropped 'mid our darkness, these decay as sure!
Dear indeed was she while among us: dear,

Now she is dead, must she forever be:
Thy portion was to clasp, within thy couch,
The noblest of all women as a wife.
Nor be the tomb of her supposed some heap
That hides mortality: but like the Gods
Honored, a veneration to a world
Of wanderers! Oft the wanderer, struck thereby,
Who else had sailed past in his merchant-ship,
Ay, he shall leave ship, land, long wind his way
Up to the mountain-summit, till there break
Speech forth, 'So, this was she, then, died of old
To save her husband! now, a deity
She bends above us. Hail, benignant one!
Give good!' Such voices sò will supplicate.
But — can it be? Alkmenê's offspring comes,
Admetos! — to thy house advances here!"

I doubt not, they supposed him decently
Dead somewhere in that winter world of Thrace —
Vanquished by one o' the Bistones, or else
Victim to some mad steed's voracity —
For did not friends prognosticate as much?
It were a new example to the point,
That "children of immortals, dropped by stealth
Into our darkness, die as sure as we!"
A case to quote and comfort people with:
But, as for lamentation, ai and pheu,
Right-minded subjects kept them for their lord.

Ay, he it was advancing! In he strode,
And took his stand before Admetos, — turned
Now by despair to such a quietude,
He neither raised his face nor spoke, this time,
The while his friend surveyed him steadily.
That friend looked rough with fighting: had he strained
Worst brute to breast was ever strangled yet?
Somehow, a victory — for there stood the strength,
Happy, as always; something grave, perhaps;
The great vein-cordage on the fret-worked front,
Black-swollen, beaded yet with battle-dew
The yellow hair o' the hero! — his big frame
A-quiver with each muscle sinking back
Into the sleepy smooth it leaped from late.
Under the great guard of one arm, there leant
A shrouded something, live and woman-like,
Propped by the heartbeats 'neath the lion-coat.
When he had finished his survey, it seemed,

The heavings of the heart began subside,
The helpful breath returned, and last the smile
Shone out, all Herakles was back again,
As the words followed the saluting hand.

"To friendly man, behooves we freely speak,
Admetos! — nor keep buried, deep in breast,
Blame we leave silent. I assuredly
Judged myself proper, if I should approach
By accident calamities of thine,
To be demonstrably thy friend: but thou
Told'st me not of the corpse then claiming care,
That was thy wife's, but didst install me guest
I' the house here, as though busied with a grief
Indeed, but then, mere grief beyond thy gate:
And so, I crowned my head, and to the Gods
Poured my libations in thy dwelling-place,
With such misfortune round me. And I blame —
Certainly blame thee, having suffered thus!
But still I would not pain thee, pained enough:
So let it pass! Wherefore I seek thee now,
Having turned back again though onward bound,
That I will tell thee. Take and keep for me
This woman, till I come thy way again,
Driving before me, having killed the king
O' the Bistones, that drove of Thrakian steeds:
In such case, give the woman back to me!
But should I fare, — as fare I fain would not,
Seeing I hope to prosper and return, —
Then, I bequeath her as thy household slave.
She came into my hands with good hard toil!
For, what find I, when started on my course,
But certain people, a whole country-side,
Holding a wrestling-bout? as good to me
As a new labor: whence I took, and here
Come keeping with me, this, the victor's prize.
For, such as conquered in the easy work,
Gained horses which they drove away: and such
As conquered in the harder, — those who boxed
And wrestled, — cattle; and, to crown the prize,
A woman followed. Chancing as I did,
Base were it to forego this fame and gain!
Well, as I said, I trust her to thy care:
No woman I have kidnapped, understand!
But good hard toil has done it: here I come!
Some day, who knows? even thou wilt praise the feat!"

Admetos raised his face and eyed the pair:
Then, hollowly and with submission, spoke,
And spoke again, and spoke time after time,
When he perceived the silence of his friend
Would not be broken by consenting word.
As a tired slave goes adding stone to stone
Until he stop some current that molests,
So poor Admetos piled up argument
Vainly against the purpose all too plain
In that great brow acquainted with command.

"Nowise dishonoring, nor amid my foes
Ranking thee, did I hide my wife's ill fate;
But it were grief superimposed on grief,
Shouldst thou have hastened to another home.
My own woe was enough for me to weep!
But, for this woman, — if it so may be, —
Bid some Thessalian, — I entreat thee, king! —
Keep her, — who has not suffered like myself!
Many of the Pheraioi welcome thee.
Be no reminder to me of my ills!
I could not, if I saw her come to live,
Restrain the tear! Inflict on me, diseased,
No new disease: woe bends me down enough!
Then, where could she be sheltered in my house,
Female and young too? For that she is young,
The vesture and adornment prove. Reflect!
Should such an one inhabit the same roof
With men? And how, mixed up, a girl, with youths,
Shall she keep pure, in that case? No light task
To curb the May-day youngster, Herakles!
I only speak because of care for thee.
Or must I, in avoidance of such harm,
Make her to enter, lead her life within
The chamber of the dead one, all apart?
How shall I introduce this other, couch
This where Alkestis lay? A double blame
I apprehend: first, from the citizens —
Lest some tongue of them taunt that I betray
My benefactress, fall into the snare
Of a new fresh face: then, the dead one's self, —
Will she not blame me likewise? Worthy, sure,
Of worship from me! circumspect my ways,
And jealous of a fault, are bound to be.
But thou, — O woman, whosoe'er thou art, —
Know, thou hast all the form, art like as like

Alkestis, in the bodily shape! Ah me!
Take — by the Gods — this woman from my sight,
Lest thou undo me, the undone before!
Since I seem — seeing her — as if I saw
My own wife! And confusions cloud my heart,
And from my eyes the springs break forth! Ah me
Unhappy — how I taste for the first time
My misery in all its bitterness!"

Whereat the friends conferred: "The chance, in truth,
Was an untoward one — none said otherwise.
Still, what a God comes giving, good or bad,
That, one should take and bear with. Take her, then!"

Herakles, — not unfastening his hold
On that same misery, beyond mistake
Hoarse in the words, convulsive in the face, —
"I would that I had such a power," said he,
"As to lead up into the light again
Thy very wife, and grant thee such a grace!"

"Well do I know thou wouldst: but where the hope?
There is no bringing back the dead to light."

"Be not extravagant in grief, no less!
Bear it, by augury of better things!"

"'T is easier to advise 'bear up,' than bear!"

"But how carve way i' the life that lies before,
If bent on groaning ever for the past?"

"I myself know that: but a certain love
Allures me to the choice I shall not change."

"Ay, but, still loving dead ones, still makes weep."

"And let it be so! She has ruined me,
And still more than I say: that answers all."

"Oh, thou hast lost a brave wife: who disputes?"

"So brave a one — that he whom thou behold'st
Will never more enjoy his life again!"

"Time will assuage! The evil yet is young!"

"Time, thou mayst say, will; if time mean — to die."

"A wife — the longing for new marriage-joys
Will stop thy sorrow!"
"Hush, friend, — hold thy peace!
What hast thou said! I could not credit ear!"

"How then? Thou wilt not marry, then, but keep
A widowed couch?"
"There is not any one
Of womankind shall couch with whom thou seest!"

"Dost think to profit thus in any way
The dead one?"
"Her, wherever she abide,
My duty is to honor."
"And I praise —
Indeed I praise thee! Still, thou hast to pay
The price of it, in being held a fool!"

"Fool call me — only one name call me not!
Bridegroom!"
"No: it was praise, I portioned thee,
Of being good true husband to thy wife!"

"When I betray her, though she is no more,
May I die!"
And the thing he said was true:
For out of Heraklês a great glow broke.
There stood a victor worthy of a prize:
The violet-crown that withers on the brow
Of the half-hearted claimant. Oh, he knew
The signs of battle hard fought and well won,
This queller of the monsters! — knew his friend
Planted firm foot, now, on the loathly thing
That was Admetos late! "would die," he knew,
Ere let the reptile raise its crest again.
If that was truth, why try the true friend more?

"Then, since thou canst be faithful to the death,
Take, deep into thy house, my dame!" smiled he.

"Not so! — I pray, by thy Progenitor!"

"Thou wilt mistake in disobeying me!"

"Obeying thee, I have to break my heart!"

"Obey me! Who knows but the favor done
May fall into its place as duty too?"

So, he was humble, would decline no more
Bearing a burden: he just sighed, "Alas!
Would thou hadst never brought this prize from game!"

"Yet, when I conquered there, thou conqueredst!"

"All excellently urged! Yet — spite of all,
Bear with me! let the woman go away!"

"She shall go, if needs must: but ere she go,
See if there *is* need!"
"Need there is! At least,
Except I make thee angry with me, so!"

"But I persist, because I have my spice
Of intuition likewise: take the dame!"

"Be thou the victor, then! But certainly
Thou dost thy friend no pleasure in the act!"

"Oh, time will come when thou shalt praise me! Now —
Only obey!"
"Then, servants, since my house
Must needs receive this woman, take her there!"

"I shall not trust this woman to the care
Of servants."
"Why, conduct her in, thyself,
If that seem preferable!"
"I prefer,
With thy good leave, to place her in thy hands!"

"I would not touch her! Entry to the house —
That, I concede thee."
"To thy sole right hand
I mean to trust her!"
"King! Thou wrenchest this
Out of me by main force, if I submit!"

"Courage, friend! Come, stretch hand forth! Good! Now touch
The stranger-woman!"

"There! A hand I stretch —
As though it meant to cut off Gorgon's head!"

"Hast hold of her?"
"Fast hold."
"Why, then, hold fast
And have her! and, one day, asseverate
Thou wilt, I think, thy friend, the son of Zeus,
He was the gentle guest to entertain!
Look at her! See if she, in any way,
Present thee with resemblance of thy wife!"

Ah, but the tears come, find the words at fault!
There is no telling how the hero twitched
The veil off: and there stood, with such fixed eyes
And such slow smile, Alkestis' silent self!
It was the crowning grace of that great heart,
To keep back joy: procrastinate the truth
Until the wife, who had made proof and found
The husband wanting, might essay once more,
Hear, see, and feel him renovated now —
Able to do, now, all herself had done,
Risen to the height of her: so, hand in hand,
The two might go together, live and die.

Beside, when he found speech, you guess the speech.
He could not think he saw his wife again:
It was some mocking God that used the bliss
To make him mad! Till Herakles must help:
Assure him that no spectre mocked at all;
He was embracing whom he buried once.
Still, — did he touch, might he address the true, —
True eye, true body of the true live wife?

And Herakles said, smiling, "All was truth.
Spectre? Admetos had not made his guest
One who played ghost-invoker, or such cheat!
Oh, he might speak and have response, in time!
All heart could wish was gained now — life for death:
Only, the rapture must not grow immense:
Take care, nor wake the envy of the Gods!"

"Oh thou, of greatest Zeus true son," — so spoke
Admetos when the closing word must come,
"Go ever in a glory of success,
And save, that sire, his offspring to the end!

For thou hast — only thou — raised me and mine
Up again to this light and life!" Then asked
Tremblingly, how was trod the perilous path
Out of the dark into the light and life:
How it had happened with Alkestis there.

And Herakles said little, but enough —
How he engaged in combat with that king
O' the dæmons: how the field of contest lay
By the tomb's self: how he sprang from ambuscade,
Captured Death, caught him in that pair of hands.

But all the time, Alkestis moved not once
Out of the set gaze and the silent smile;
And a cold fear ran through Admetos' frame:
"Why does she stand and front me, silent thus?"

Herakles solemnly replied, "Not yet
Is it allowable thou hear the things
She has to tell thee; let evanish quite
That consecration to the lower Gods,
And on our upper world the third day rise!
Lead her in, meanwhile; good and true thou art,
Good, true, remain thou! Practise piety
To stranger-guests the old way! So, farewell!
Since forth I fare, fulfil my urgent task
Set by the king, the son of Sthenelos."

Fain would Admetos keep that splendid smile
Ever to light him. "Stay with us, thou heart!
Remain our house-friend!"
"At some other day!
Now, of necessity, I haste!" smiled he.

"But mayst thou prosper, go forth on a foot
Sure to return! Through all the tetrarchy,
Command my subjects that they institute
Thanksgiving-dances for the glad event,
And bid each altar smoke with sacrifice!
For we are minded to begin a fresh
Existence, better than the life before;
Seeing I own myself supremely blest."

Whereupon all the friendly moralists
Drew this conclusion: chirped, each beard to each:
"Manifold are thy shapings, Providence!

Many a hopeless matter Gods arrange.
What we expected never came to pass:
What we did not expect Gods brought to bear;
So have things gone, this whole experience through!"

Ah, but if you had seen the play itself!
They say, my poet failed to get the prize:
Sophokles got the prize, — great name! They say,
Sophokles also means to make a piece,
Model a new Admetos, a new wife:
Success to him! One thing has many sides.
The great name! But no good supplants a good,
Nor beauty undoes beauty. Sophokles
Will carve and carry a fresh cup, brimful
Of beauty and good, firm to the altar-foot,
And glorify the Dionusiac shrine:
Not clash against this crater in the place
Where the God put it when his mouth had drained,
To the last dregs, libation life-blood-like,
And praised Euripides forevermore —
The Human with his droppings of warm tears.

Still, since one thing may have so many sides,
I think I see how, — far from Sophokles, —
You, I, or any one might mould a new
Admetos, new Alkestis. Ah, that brave
Bounty of poets, the one royal race
That ever was, or will be, in this world!
They give no gift that bounds itself and ends
I' the giving and the taking: theirs so breeds
I' the heart and soul o' the taker, so transmutes
The man who only was a man before,
That he grows godlike in his turn, can give —
He also: share the poets' privilege,
Bring forth new good, new beauty, from the old.
As though the cup that gave the wine, gave, too,
The God's prolific giver of the grape,
That vine, was wont to find out, fawn around
His footstep, springing still to bless the dearth,
At bidding of a Mainad. So with me:
For I have drunk this poem, quenched my thirst,
Satisfied heart and soul — yet more remains!
Could we too make a poem? Try at least,
Inside the head, what shape the rose-mists take!

When God Apollon took, for punishment,
A mortal form and sold himself a slave
To King Admetos till a term should end, —
Not only did he make, in servitude,
Such music, while he fed the flocks and herds,
As saved the pasturage from wrong or fright,
Curing rough creatures of ungentleness:
Much more did that melodious wisdom work
Within the heart o' the master: there, ran wild
Many a lust and greed that grow to strength
By preying on the native pity and care,
Would else, all undisturbed, possess the land.

And these, the God so tamed, with golden tongue,
That, in the plenitude of youth and power,
Admetos vowed himself to rule thenceforth
In Pherai solely for his people's sake,
Subduing to such end each lust and greed
That dominates the natural charity.

And so the struggle ended. Right ruled might:
And soft yet brave, and good yet wise, the man
Stood up to be a monarch; having learned
The worth of life, life's worth would he bestow
On all whose lot was cast, to live or die,
As he determined for the multitude.
So stands a statue: pedestalled sublime,
Only that it may wave the thunder off,
And ward, from winds that vex, a world below.

And then, — as if a whisper found its way
E'en to the sense o' the marble, — "Vain thy vow!
The royalty of its resolve, that head
Shall hide within the dust ere day be done:
That arm, its outstretch of beneficence,
Shall have a speedy ending on the earth:
Lie patient, prone, while light some cricket leaps
And takes possession of the masterpiece,
To sit, sing louder as more near the sun.
For why? A flaw was in the pedestal;
Who knows? A worm's work! Sapped, the certain fate
O' the statue is to fall, and thine to die!"

Whereat the monarch, calm, addressed himself
To die, but bitterly the soul outbroke —
"O prodigality of life, blind waste

I' the world, of power profuse without the will
To make life do its work, deserve its day!
My ancestors pursued their pleasure, poured
The blood o' the people out in idle war,
Or took occasion of some weary peace
To bid men dig down deep or build up high,
Spend bone and marrow that the king might feast
Intrenched and buttressed from the vulgar gaze.
Yet they all lived, nay, lingered to old age:
As though Zeus loved that they should laugh to scorn
The vanity of seeking other ends
In rule, than just the ruler's pastime. They
Lived; I must die."

And, as some long last moan
Of a minor suddenly is propped beneath
By note which, new-struck, turns the wail, that was,
Into a wonder and a triumph, so
Began Alkestis: "Nay, thou art to live!
The glory that, in the disguise of flesh,
Was helpful to our house, — he prophesied
The coming fate: whereon, I pleaded sore
That he, — I guessed a God, who to his couch
Amid the clouds must go and come again,
While we were darkling, — since he loved us both,
He should permit thee, at whatever price,
To live and carry out to heart's content
Soul's purpose, turn each thought to very deed,
Nor let Zeus lose the monarch meant in thee.

"To which Apollon, with a sunset smile,
Sadly — 'And so should mortals arbitrate!
It were unseemly if they aped us Gods,
And, mindful of our chain of consequence,
Lost care of the immediate earthly link:
Forewent the comfort of life's little hour,
In prospect of some cold abysmal blank
Alien eternity, — unlike the time
They know, and understand to practise with, —
No, — our eternity — no heart's blood, bright
And warm outpoured in its behoof, would tinge
Never so palely, warm a whit the more:
Whereas retained and treasured — left to beat
Joyously on, a life's length, in the breast
O' the loved and loving — it would throb itself
Through, and suffuse the earthly tenement,
Transform it, even as your mansion here

Is love-transformed into a temple-home
Where I, a God, forget the Olumpian glow,
I' the feel of human richness like the rose:
Your hopes and fears, so blind and yet so sweet
With death about them. Therefore, well in thee
To look, not on eternity, but time:
To apprehend that, should Admetos die,
All, we Gods purposed in him, dies as sure:
That, life's link snapping, all our chain is lost.
And yet a mortal glance might pierce, methinks,
Deeper into the seeming dark of things,
And learn, no fruit, man's life can bear, will fade:
Learn, if Admetos die now, so much more
Will pity for the frailness found in flesh,
Will terror at the earthly chance and change
Frustrating wisest scheme of noblest soul,
Will these go wake the seeds of good asleep
Throughout the world: as oft a rough wind sheds
The unripe promise of some field-flower, — true!
But loosens too the level, and lets breathe
A thousand captives for the year to come.
Nevertheless, obtain thy prayer, stay fate!
Admetos lives — if thou wilt die for him!'

"So was the pact concluded that I die,
And thou live on, live for thyself, for me,
For all the world. Embrace and bid me hail,
Husband, because I have the victory —
Am, heart, soul, head to foot, one happiness!"

Whereto Admetos, in a passionate cry:
"Never, by that true word Apollon spoke!
All the unwise wish is unwished, O wife!
Let purposes of Zeus fulfil themselves,
If not through me, then through some other man!
Still, in myself he had a purpose too,
Inalienably mine, to end with me:
This purpose — that, throughout my earthly life,
Mine should be mingled and made up with thine, —
And we two prove one force and play one part
And do one thing. Since death divides the pair,
'T is well that I depart and thou remain
Who wast to me as spirit is to flesh:
Let the flesh perish, be perceived no more,
So thou, the spirit that informed the flesh,
Bend yet awhile, a very flame above

The rift I drop into the darkness by, —
And bid remember, flesh and spirit once
Worked in the world, one body, for man's sake.
Never be that abominable show
Of passive death without a quickening life —
Admetos only, no Alkestis now!"

Then she: "O thou Admetos, must the pile
Of truth on truth, which needs but one truth more
To tower up in completeness, trophy-like,
Emprise of man, and triumph of the world,
Must it go ever to the ground again
Because of some faint heart or faltering hand,
Which we, that breathless world about the base,
Trusted should carry safe to altitude,
Superimpose o' the summit, our supreme
Achievement, our victorious coping-stone?
Shall thine, Beloved, prove the hand and heart
That fail again, flinch backward at the truth
Would cap and crown the structure this last time, —
Precipitate our monumental hope
And strew the earth ignobly yet once more?
See how, truth piled on truth, the structure wants,
Waits just the crowning truth I claim of thee!
Wouldst thou, for any joy to be enjoyed,
For any sorrow that thou mightst escape,
Unwill thy will to reign a righteous king?
Nowise! And were there two lots, death and life, —
Life, wherein good resolve should go to air,
Death, whereby finest fancy grew plain fact
I' the reign of thy survivor, — life or death?
Certainly death, thou choosest. Here stand I
The wedded, the beloved one: hadst thou loved
Her who less worthily could estimate
Both life and death than thou? Not so should say
Admetos, whom Apollon made come court
Alkestis in a car, submissive brutes
Of blood were yoked to, symbolizing soul
Must dominate unruly sense in man.
Then, shall Admetos and Alkestis see
Good alike, and alike choose, each for each,
Good, — and yet, each for other, at the last,
Choose evil? What? thou soundest in my soul
To depths below the deepest, reachest good
In evil, that makes evil good again,
And so allottest to me that I live

And not die — letting die, not thee alone,
But all true life that lived in both of us?
Look at me once ere thou decree the lot!"

Therewith her whole soul entered into his,
He looked the look back, and Alkestis died.

And even while it lay, i' the look of him,
Dead, the dimmed body, bright Alkestis' soul
Had penetrated through the populace
Of ghosts, was got to Koré, — throned and crowned,
The pensive queen o' the twilight, where she dwells
Forever in a muse, but half away
From flowery earth she lost and hankers for, —
And there demanded to become a ghost
Before the time.

Whereat the softened eyes
Of the lost maidenhood that lingered still
Straying among the flowers in Sicily,
Sudden was startled back to Hades' throne
By that demand: broke through humanity
Into the orbed omniscience of a God,
Searched at a glance Alkestis to the soul,
And said — while a long slow sigh lost itself
I' the hard and hollow passage of a laugh:

"Hence, thou deceiver! This is not to die,
If, by the very death which mocks me now,
The life, that 's left behind and past my power,
Is formidably doubled. Say, there fight
Two athletes, side by side, each athlete armed
With only half the weapons, and no more,
Adequate to a contest with their foe:
If one of these should fling helm, sword and shield
To fellow — shieldless, swordless, helmless late —
And so leap naked o'er the barrier, leave
A combatant equipped from head to heel,
Yet cry to the other side, 'Receive a friend
Who fights no longer!' 'Back, friend, to the fray!'
Would be the prompt rebuff; I echo it.
Two souls in one were formidable odds:
Admetos must not be himself and thou!"

And so, before the embrace relaxed a whit,
The lost eyes opened, still beneath the look;

And lo, Alkestis was alive again,
And of Admetos' rapture who shall speak?

So, the two lived together long and well.
But never could I learn, by word of scribe
Or voice of poet, rumor wafts our way,
That — of the scheme of rule in righteousness,
The bringing back again the Golden Age,
Which, rather than renounce, our pair would die —
That ever one faint particle came true,
With both alive to bring it to effect:
Such is the envy Gods still bear mankind!

So might our version of the story prove,
And no Euripidean pathos plague
Too much my critic-friend of Syracuse.

"Besides your poem failed to get the prize:
(That is, the first prize: second prize is none.)
Sophokles got it!" Honor the great name!
All cannot love two great names; yet some do:
I know the poetess who graved in gold,
Among her glories that shall never fade,
This style and title for Euripides,
The Human with his droppings of warm tears.

I know, too, a great Kaunian painter, strong
As Herakles, though rosy with a robe
Of grace that softens down the sinewy strength:
And he has made a picture of it all.
There lies Alkestis dead, beneath the sun,
She longed to look her last upon, beside
The sea, which somehow tempts the life in us
To come trip over its white waste of waves,
And try escape from earth, and fleet as free.
Behind the body, I suppose there bends
Old Pheres in his hoary impotence;
And women-wailers, in a corner crouch
— Four, beautiful as you four — yes, indeed! —
Close, each to other, agonizing all,
As fastened, in fear's rhythmic sympathy,
To two contending opposite. There strains
The might o' the hero 'gainst his more than match,
— Death, dreadful not in thew and bone, but like
The envenomed substance that exudes some dew
Whereby the merely honest flesh and blood

Will fester up and run to ruin straight,
Ere they can close with, clasp and overcome
The poisonous impalpability
That simulates a form beneath the flow
Of those gray garments; I pronounce that piece
Worthy to set up in our Poikilé!

And all came, — glory of the golden verse,
And passion of the picture, and that fine
Frank outgush of the human gratitude
Which saved our ship and me, in Syracuse, —
Ay, and the tear or two which slipt perhaps
Away from you, friends, while I told my tale,
— It all came of this play that gained no prize!
Why crown whom Zeus has crowned in soul before?

PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU

SAVIOR OF SOCIETY

[1871]

Ὕδραν φονεύσας, μυρίων τ' ἄλλων πόνων
διῆλθον ἀγέλας . . .
τὸ λοίσθιον δὲ τόνδ' ἔτλην τάλας πόνον,
. . . δῶμα θριγκῶσαι κακοῖς.

I slew the Hydra, and from labor pass'd
To labor — tribes of labors! Till, at last,
Attempting one more labor, in a trice,
Alack, with ills I *crowned the edifice.*

You have seen better days, dear? So have I —
And worse too, for they brought no such bud-mouth
As yours to lisp "You wish you knew me!" Well,
Wise men, 't is said, have sometimes wished the same,
And wished and had their trouble for their pains.
Suppose my Œdipus should lurk at last
Under a pork-pie hat and crinoline,
And, latish, pounce on Sphinx in Leicester Square?
Or likelier, what if Sphinx in wise old age,
Grown sick of snapping foolish people's heads,
And jealous for her riddle's proper rede, —
Jealous that the good trick which served the turn
Have justice rendered it, nor class one day
With friend Home's stilts and tongs and medium-ware, —
What if the once redoubted Sphinx, I say,
(Because night draws on, and the sands increase,
And desert-whispers grow a prophecy,)
Tell all to Corinth of her own accord,
Bright Corinth, not dull Thebes, for Laïs' sake,
Who finds me hardly gray, and likes my nose,
And thinks a man of sixty at the prime?
Good! It shall be! Revealment of myself!

But listen, for we must co-operate;
I don't drink tea: permit me the cigar!

First, how to make the matter plain, of course —
What was the law by which I lived. Let 's see:
Ay, we must take one instant of my life
Spent sitting by your side in this neat room:
Watch well the way I use it, and don't laugh!
Here 's paper on the table, pen and ink:
Give me the soiled bit — not the pretty rose!
See! having sat an hour, I 'm rested now,
Therefore want work: and spy no better work
For eye and hand and mind that guides them both,
During this instant, than to draw my pen
From blot One — thus — up, up to blot Two — thus —
Which I at last reach, thus, and here 's my line
Five inches long and tolerably straight:
Better to draw than leave undrawn, I think,
Fitter to do than let alone, I hold,
Though better, fitter, by but one degree.
Therefore it was that, rather than sit still
Simply, my right-hand drew it while my left
Pulled smooth and pinched the moustache to a point.

Now I permit your plump lips to unpurse:
"So far, one possibly may understand
Without recourse to witchcraft!" True, my dear.
Thus folks begin with Euclid, — finish, how?
Trying to square the circle! — at any rate,
Solving abstruser problems than this first,
"How find the nearest way 'twixt point and point."
Deal but with moral mathematics so —
Master one merest moment's work of mine,
Even this practising with pen and ink, —
Demonstrate why I rather plied the quill
Than left the space a blank, — you gain a fact,
And God knows what a fact 's worth! So proceed
By inference from just this moral fact
— I don't say, to that plaguy quadrature,
"What the whole man meant, whom you wish you knew,"
But, what meant certain things he did of old,
Which puzzled Europe, — why, you 'll find them plain,
This way, not otherwise: I guarantee,
Understand one, you comprehend the rest.
Rays from all round converge to any point:
Study the point then ere you track the rays!

The size o' the circle 's nothing; subdivide
Earth, and earth's smallest grain of mustard-seed,
You count as many parts, small matching large,
If you can use the mind's eye: otherwise,
Material optics, being gross at best,
Prefer the large and leave our mind the small --
And pray how many folk have minds can see?
Certainly you — and somebody in Thrace
Whose name escapes me at the moment. You —
Lend me your mind then! Analyze with me
This instance of the line 'twixt blot and blot
I rather chose to draw than leave a blank,
Things else being equal. You are taught thereby
That 't is my nature, when I am at ease,
Rather than idle out my life too long,
To want to do a thing — to put a thought,
Whether a great thought or a little one,
Into an act, as nearly as may be.
Make what is absolutely new — I can't,
Mar what is made already well enough —
I won't: but turn to best account the thing
That 's half-made — that I can. Two blots, you saw
I knew how to extend into a line
Symmetric on the sheet they blurred before —
Such little act sufficed, this time, such thought.

Now, we 'll extend rays, widen out the verge,
Describe a larger circle; leave this first
Clod of an instance we began with, rise
To the complete world many clods effect.
Only continue patient while I throw,
Delver-like, spadeful after spadeful up,
Just as truths come, the subsoil of me, mould
Whence spring my moods: your object, — just to find,
Alike from handlift and from barrow-load,
What salts and silts may constitute the earth —
If it be proper stuff to blow man glass,
Or bake him pottery, bear him oaks or wheat —
What 's born of me, in brief; which found, all 's known.
If it were genius did the digging-job,
Logic would speedily sift its product smooth
And leave the crude truths bare for poetry;
But I 'm no poet, and am stiff i' the back.
What one spread fails to bring, another may.
In goes the shovel and out comes scoop — as here!

I live to please myself. I recognize
Power passing mine, immeasurable, God —
Above me, whom He made, as heaven beyond
Earth — to use figures which assist our sense.
I know that He is there as I am here,
By the same proof, which seems no proof at all,
It so exceeds familiar forms of proof.
Why "there," not "here"? Because, when I say "there,
I treat the feeling with distincter shape
That space exists between us: I, — not He, —
Live, think, do human work here — no machine,
His will moves, but a being by myself,
His, and not He who made me for a work,
Watches my working, judges its effect,
But does not interpose. He did so once,
And probably will again some time — not now,
Life being the minute of mankind, not God's,
In a certain sense, like time before and time
After man's earthly life, so far as man
Needs apprehend the matter. Am I clear?
Suppose I bid a courier take to-night —
(. . . Once for all, let me talk as if I smoked
Yet in the Residenz, a personage:
I must still represent the thing I was,
Galvanically make dead muscle play,
Or how shall I illustrate muscle's use?)
I could then, last July, bid courier take
Message for me, post-haste, a thousand miles.
I bid him, since I have the right to bid,
And, my part done so far, his part begins;
He starts with due equipment, will and power,
Means he may use, misuse, not use at all,
At his discretion, at his peril too.
I leave him to himself: but, journey done,
I count the minutes, call for the result
In quickness and the courier quality,
Weigh its worth, and then punish or reward
According to proved service; not before.
Meantime, he sleeps through noontide, rides till dawn,
Sticks to the straight road, tries the crooked path,
Measures and manages resource, trusts, doubts
Advisers by the wayside, does his best
At his discretion, lags or launches forth,
(He knows and I know) at his peril too.
You see? Exactly thus men stand to God:
I with my courier, God with me. Just so

I have His bidding to perform; but mind
And body, all of me, though made and meant
For that sole service, must consult, concert
With my own self and nobody beside,
How to effect the same: God helps not else.
'T is I who, with my stock of craft and strength,
Choose the directer cut across the hedge,
Or keep the foot-track that respects a crop.
Lie down and rest, rise up and run, — live spare,
Feed free, — all that 's my business: but, arrive,
Deliver message, bring the answer back,
And make my bow, I must: then God will speak,
Praise me or haply blame as service proves.
To other men, to each and every one,
Another law! what likelier? God, perchance,
Grants each new man, by some as new a mode,
Intercommunication with Himself,
Wreaking on finiteness infinitude;
By such a series of effects, gives each
Last His own imprint: old yet ever new
The process: 't is the way of Deity.
How it succeeds, He knows: I only know
That varied modes of creatureship abound,
Implying just as varied intercourse
For each with the creator of them all.
Each has his own mind and no other's mode.
What mode may yours be? I shall sympathize!
No doubt, you, good young lady that you are,
Despite a natural naughtiness or two,
Turn eyes up like a Pradier Magdalen
And see an outspread providential hand
Above the owl's-wing aigrette — guard and guide —
Visibly o'er your path, about your bed,
Through all your practisings with London-town.
It points, you go; it stays fixed, and you stop;
You quicken its procedure by a word
Spoken, a thought in silence, prayer and praise.
Well, I believe that such a hand may stoop,
And such appeals to it may stave off harm,
Pacify the grim guardian of this Square,
And stand you in good stead on quarter-day:
Quite possible in your case; not in mine.
"Ah, but I choose to make the difference,
Find the emancipation?" No, I hope!
If I deceive myself, take noon for night,
Please to become determinedly blind

To the true ordinance of human life,
Through mere presumption — that is my affair,
And truly a grave one; but as grave I think
Your affair, yours, the specially observed, —
Each favored person that perceives his path
Pointed him, inch by inch, and looks above
For guidance, through the mazes of this world,
In what we call its meanest life-career
— Not how to manage Europe properly,
But how keep open shop, and yet pay rent,
Rear household, and make both ends meet, the same.
I say, such man is no less tasked than I
To duly take the path appointed him
By whatsoever sign he recognize.
Our insincerity on both our heads!
No matter what the object of a life,
Small work or large, — the making thrive a shop,
Or seeing that an empire take no harm, —
There are known fruits to judge obedience by.
You 've read a ton's weight, now, of newspaper —
Lives of me, gabble about the kind of prince —
You know my work i' the rough; I ask you, then,
Do I appear subordinated less
To hand-impulsion, one prime push for all,
Than little lives of men, the multitude
That cried out, every quarter of an hour,
For fresh instructions, did or did not work,
And praised in the odd minutes?

Eh, my dear?

Such is the reason why I acquiesced
In doing what seemed best for me to do,
So as to please myself on the great scale,
Having regard to immortality
No less than life — did that which head and heart
Prescribed my hand, in measure with its means
Of doing — used my special stock of power —
Not from the aforesaid head and heart alone,
But every sort of helpful circumstance,
Some problematic and some nondescript:
All regulated by the single care
I' the last resort — that I made thoroughly serve
The when and how, toiled where was need, reposed
As resolutely at the proper point,
Braved sorrow, courted joy, to just one end:
Namely, that just the creature I was bound

To be, I should become, nor thwart at all
God's purpose in creation. I conceive
No other duty possible to man, —
Highest mind, lowest mind, — no other law
By which to judge life failure or success:
What folk call being saved or cast away.

Such was my rule of life; I worked my best,
Subject to ultimate judgment, God's not man's.
Well then, this settled, — take your tea, I beg,
And meditate the fact, 'twixt sip and sip, —
This settled — why I pleased myself, you saw,
By turning blot and blot into a line,
O' the little scale, — we 'll try now (as your tongue
Tries the concluding sugar-drop) what 's meant
To please me most o' the great scale. Why, just now,
With nothing else to do within my reach,
Did I prefer making two blots one line
To making yet another separate
Third blot, and leaving those I found unlinked?
It meant, I like to use the thing I find,
Rather than strive at unfound novelty:
I make the best of the old, nor try for new.
Such will to act, such choice of action's way,
Constitute — when at work on the great scale,
Driven to their farthest natural consequence
By all the help from all the means — my own
Particular faculty of serving God,
Instinct for putting power to exercise
Upon some wish and want o' the time, I prove
Possible to mankind as best I may.
This constitutes my mission, — grant the phrase, —
Namely, to rule men — men within my reach,
To order, influence and dispose them so
As render solid and stabilify
Mankind in particles, the light and loose,
For their good and my pleasure in the act.
Such good accomplished proves twice good to me —
Good for its own sake, as the just and right,
And, in the effecting also, good again
To me its agent, tasked as suits my taste.

Is this much easy to be understood
At first glance? Now begin the steady gaze!

My rank — (if I must tell you simple truth —
Telling were else not worth the whiff o' the weed

I lose for the tale's sake) — dear, my rank i' the world
Is hard to know and name precisely: err
I may, but scarcely over-estimate
My style and title. Do I class with men
Most useful to their fellows? Possibly, —
Therefore, in some sort, best; but, greatest mind
And rarest nature? Evidently no.
A conservator, call me, if you please,
Not a creator nor destroyer: one
Who keeps the world safe. I profess to trace
The broken circle of society,
Dim actual order, I can redescribe
Not only where some segment silver-true
Stays clear, but where the breaks of black commence
Baffling you all who want the eye to probe —
As I make out yon problematic thin
White paring of your thumb-nail outside there,
Above the plaster-monarch on his steed —
See an inch, name an ell, and prophesy
O' the rest that ought to follow, the round moon
Now hiding in the night of things: that round,
I labor to demonstrate moon enough
For the month's purpose, — that society,
Render efficient for the age's need:
Preserving you in either case the old,
Nor aiming at a new and greater thing,
A sun for moon, a future to be made
By first abolishing the present law:
No such proud task for me by any means!
History shows you men whose master-touch
Not so much modifies as makes anew:
Minds that transmute nor need restore at all.
A breath of God made manifest in flesh
Subjects the world to change, from time to time,
Alters the whole conditions of our race
Abruptly, not by unperceived degrees
Nor play of elements already there,
But quite new leaven, leavening the lump,
And liker, so, the natural process. See!
Where winter reigned for ages — by a turn
I' the time, some star-change, (ask geologists,)
The ice-tracts split, clash, splinter and disperse,
And there 's an end of immobility,
Silence, and all that tinted pageant, base
To pinnacle, one flush from fairy-land
Dead-asleep and deserted somewhere, — see! —

As a fresh sun, wave, spring and joy outburst.
Or else the earth it is, time starts from trance,
Her mountains tremble into fire, her plains
Heave blinded by confusion: what result?
New teeming growth, surprises of strange life
Impossible before, a world broke up
And re-made, order gained by law destroyed.
Not otherwise, in our society
Follow like portents, all as absolute
Regenerations: they have birth at rare
Uncertain unexpected intervals
O' the world, by ministry impossible
Before and after fulness of the days:
Some dervish desert-spectre, swordsman, saint,
Lawgiver, lyrist, — oh, we know the names!
Quite other these than I. Our time requires
No such strange potentate, — who else would dawn, —
No fresh force till the old have spent itself.
Such seems the natural economy.
To shoot a beam into the dark, assists:
To make that beam do fuller service, spread
And utilize such bounty to the height,
That assists also, — and that work is mine.
I recognize, contemplate, and approve
The general compact of society,
Not simply as I see effected good,
But good i' the germ, each chance that 's possible
I' the plan traced so far: all results, in short,
For better or worse of the operation due
To those exceptional natures, unlike mine,
Who, helping, thwarting, conscious, unaware,
Did somehow manage to so far describe
This diagram left ready to my hand,
Waiting my turn of trial. I see success,
See failure, see what makes or mars throughout.
How shall I else but help complete this plan
Of which I know the purpose and approve,
By letting stay therein what seems to stand,
And adding good thereto of easier reach
To-day than yesterday?

So much, no more!
Whereon, "No more than that?" — inquire aggrieved
Half of my critics: "nothing new at all?
The old plan saved, instead of a sponged slate
And fresh-drawn figure?" — while, "So much as that?"

Object their fellows of the other faith:
"Leave uneffaced the crazy labyrinth
Of alteration and amendment, lines
Which every dabster felt in duty bound
To signalize his power of pen and ink
By adding to a plan once plain enough?
Why keep each fool's bequeathment, scratch and blur
Which overscrawl and underscore the piece —
Nay, strengthen them by touches of your own?"

Well, that 's my mission, so I serve the world,
Figure as man o' the moment, — in default
Of somebody inspired to strike such change
Into society — from round to square,
The ellipsis to the rhomboid, how you please,
As suits the size and shape o' the world he finds.
But this I can, — and nobody my peer, —
Do the best with the least change possible:
Carry the incompleteness on, a stage,
Make what was crooked straight, and roughness smooth,
And weakness strong: wherein if I succeed,
It will not prove the worst achievement, sure,
In the eyes at least of one man, one I look
Nowise to catch in critic company:
To wit, the man inspired, the genius' self
Destined to come and change things thoroughly.
He, at least, finds his business simplified,
Distinguishes the done from undone, reads
Plainly what meant and did not mean this time
We live in, and I work on, and transmit
To such successor: he will operate
On good hard substance, not mere shade and shine.
Let all my critics, born to idleness
And impotency, get their good, and have
Their hooting at the giver: I am deaf —
Who find great good in this society,
Great gain, the purchase of great labor. Touch
The work I may and must, but — reverent
In every fall o' the finger-tip, no doubt.
Perhaps I find all good there 's warrant for
I' the world as yet: nay, to the end of time, —
Since evil never means part company
With mankind, only shift side and change shape.
I find advance i' the main, and notably
The Present an improvement on the Past,
And promise for the Future — which shall prove

Only the Present with its rough made smooth,
Its indistinctness emphasized; I hope
No better, nothing newer for mankind,
But something equably smoothed everywhere,
Good, reconciled with hardly-quite-as-good,
Instead of good and bad each jostling each.
"And that 's all?" Ay, and quite enough for me!
We have toiled so long to gain what gain I find
I' the Present, — let us keep it! We shall toil
So long before we gain — if gain God grant —
A Future with one touch of difference
I' the heart of things, and not their outside face, —
Let us not risk the whiff of my cigar
For Fourier, Comte, and all that ends in smoke!

This I see clearest probably of men
With power to act and influence, now alive:
Juster than they to the true state of things;
In consequence, more tolerant that, side
By side, shall co-exist and thrive alike
In the age, the various sorts of happiness
Moral, mark! — not material — moods o' the mind
Suited to man and man his opposite:
Say, minor modes of movement — hence to there,
Or thence to here, or simply round about —
So long as each toe spares its neighbor's kibe,
Nor spoils the major march and main advance.
The love of peace, care for the family,
Contentment with what 's bad but might be worse —
Good movements these! and good, too, discontent,
So long as that spurs good, which might be best,
Into becoming better, anyhow:
Good — pride of country, putting hearth and home
I' the background, out of undue prominence:
Good — yearning after change, strife, victory,
And triumph. Each shall have its orbit marked,
But no more, — none impede the other's path
In this wide world, — though each and all alike,
Save for me, fain would spread itself through space
And leave its fellow not an inch of way.
I rule and regulate the course, excite,
Restrain: because the whole machine should march
Impelled by those diversely-moving parts,
Each blind to aught beside its little bent.
Out of the turnings round and round inside,
Comes that straightforward world-advance, I want,

And none of them supposes God wants too
And gets through just their hindrance and my help.
I think that to have held the balance straight
For twenty years, say, weighing claim and claim
And giving each its due, no less no more,
This was good service to humanity,
Right usage of my power in head and heart,
And reasonable piety beside.
Keep those three points in mind while judging me!
You stand, perhaps, for some one man, not men, —
Represent this or the other interest,
Nor mind the general welfare, — so, impugn
My practice and dispute my value: why?
You man of faith, I did not tread the world
Into a paste, and thereof make a smooth
Uniform mound whereon to plant your flag,
The lily-white, above the blood and brains!
Nor yet did I, you man of faithlessness,
So roll things to the level which you love,
That you could stand at ease there and survey
The universal Nothing undisgraced
By pert obtrusion of some old church-spire
I' the distance! Neither friend would I content,
Nor, as the world were simply meant for him,
Thrust out his fellow and mend God's mistake.
Why, you two fools, — my dear friends all the same, —
Is it some change o' the world and nothing else
Contents you? Should whatever was, not be?
How thanklessly you view things! There 's the root
Of the evil, source of the entire mistake:
You see no worth i' the world, nature and life,
Unless we change what is to what may be,
Which means, — may be, i' the brain of one of you!
"Reject what is?" — all capabilities —
Nay, you may style them chances if you choose —
All chances, then, of happiness that lie
Open to anybody that is born,
Tumbles into this life and out again, —
All that may happen, good and evil too,
I' the space between, to each adventurer
Upon this 'sixty, Anno Domini:
A life to live — and such a life! a world
To learn, one's lifetime in, — and such a world!
How did the foolish ever pass for wise
By calling life a burden, man a fly
Or worm or what 's most insignificant?

"O littleness of man!" deplores the bard;
And then, for fear the Powers should punish him,
"O grandeur of the visible universe
Our human littleness contrasts withal!
O sun, O moon, ye mountains and thou sea,
Thou emblem of immensity, thou this,
That and the other, — what impertinence
In man to eat and drink and walk about
And have his little notions of his own,
The while some wave sheds foam upon the shore!"
First of all, 't is a lie some three-times thick:
The bard, — this sort of speech being poetry, —
The bard puts mankind well outside himself
And then begins instructing them: "This way
I and my friend the sea conceive of you!
What would you give to think such thoughts as ours
Of you and the sea together?" Down they go
On the humbled knees of them: at once they draw
Distinction, recognize no mate of theirs
In one, despite his mock humility,
So plain a match for what he plays with. Next,
The turn of the great ocean-playfellow,
When the bard, leaving Bond Street very far
From ear-shot, cares not to ventriloquize,
But tells the sea its home-truths: "You, my match?
You, all this terror and immensity
And what not? Shall I tell you what you are?
Just fit to hitch into a stanza, so
Wake up and set in motion who 's asleep
O' the other side of you in England, else
Unaware, as folk pace their Bond Street now,
Somebody here despises them so much!
Between us, — they are the ultimate! to them
And their perception go these lordly thoughts:
Since what were ocean — mane and tail, to boot —
Mused I not here, how make thoughts thinkable?
Start forth my stanza and astound the world!
Back, billows, to your insignificance!
Deep, you are done with!"

Learn, my gifted friend,
There are two things i' the world, still wiser folk
Accept — intelligence and sympathy.
You pant about unutterable power
I' the ocean, all you feel but cannot speak?
Why, that 's the plainest speech about it all.

You did not feel what was not to be felt.
Well, then, all else but what man feels is nought —
The wash o' the liquor that o'erbrims the cup
Called man, and runs to waste adown his side,
Perhaps to feed a cataract, — who cares?
I 'll tell you: all the more I know mankind,
The more I thank God, like my grandmother,
For making me a little lower than
The angels, honor-clothed and glory-crowned:
This is the honor, — that no thing I know,
Feel or conceive, but I can make my own
Somehow, by use of hand or head or heart:
This is the glory, — that in all conceived,
Or felt or known, I recognize a mind
Not mine but like mine, — for the double joy, —
Making all things for me and me for Him.
There 's folly for you at this time of day!
So think it! and enjoy your ignorance
Of what — no matter for the worthy's name —
Wisdom set working in a noble heart,
When he, who was earth's best geometer
Up to that time of day, consigned his life
With its results into one matchless book,
The triumph of the human mind so far,
All in geometry man yet could do:
And then wrote on the dedication-page
In place of name the universe applauds,
"But, God, what a geometer art Thou!"
I suppose Heaven is, through Eternity,
The equalizing, ever and anon,
In momentary rapture, great with small,
Omniscience with intelligency, God
With man, — the thunder-glow from pole to pole
Abolishing, a blissful moment-space,
Great cloud alike and small cloud, in one fire —
As sure to ebb as sure again to flow
When the new receptivity deserves
The new completion. There 's the Heaven for me.
And I say, therefore, to live out one's life
I' the world here, with the chance, — whether by pain
Or pleasure be the process, long or short
The time, august or mean the circumstance
To human eye, — of learning how set foot
Decidedly on some one path to Heaven,
Touch segment in the circle whence all lines
Lead to the centre equally, red lines

Or black lines, so they but produce themselves —
This, I do say, — and here my sermon ends, —
This makes it worth our while to tenderly
Handle a state of things which mend we might,
Mar we may, but which meanwhile helps so far.
Therefore my end is — save society!

"And that 's all?" twangs the never-failing taunt
O' the foe — "No novelty, creativeness,
Mark of the master that renews the age?"
"Nay, all that?" rather will demur my judge
I look to hear some day, nor friend nor foe —
"Did you attain, then, to perceive that God
Knew what He undertook when He made things?"
Ay: that my task was to co-operate
Rather than play the rival, chop and change
The order whence comes all the good we know,
With this, — good's last expression to our sense, —
That there 's a further good conceivable
Beyond the utmost earth can realize:
And, therefore, that to change the agency,
The evil whereby good is brought about —
Try to make good do good as evil does —
Were just as if a chemist, wanting white,
And knowing black ingredients bred the dye,
Insisted these too should be white forsooth!
Correct the evil, mitigate your best,
Blend mild with harsh, and soften black to gray
If gray may follow with no detriment
To the eventual perfect purity!
But as for hazarding the main result
By hoping to anticipate one half
In the intermediate process, — no, my friends!
This bad world, I experience and approve;
Your good world, — with no pity, courage, hope,
Fear, sorrow, joy, — devotedness, in short,
Which I account the ultimate of man,
Of which there 's not one day nor hour but brings,
In flower or fruit, some sample of success,
Out of this same society I save —
None of it for me! That I might have none,
I rapped your tampering knuckles twenty years.
Such was the task imposed me, such my end.

Now for the means thereto. Ah, confidence —
Keep we together or part company?

This is the critical minute! "Such my end?"
Certainly; how could it be otherwise?
Can there be question which was the right task —
To save or to destroy society?
Why, even prove that, by some miracle,
Destruction were the proper work to choose,
And that a torch best remedies what 's wrong
I' the temple, whence the long procession wound
Of powers and beauties, earth's achievements all,
The human strength that strove and overthrew, —
The human love that, weak itself, crowned strength, —
The instinct crying, "God is whence I came!" —
The reason laying down the law, "And such
His will i' the world must be!" — the leap and shout
Of genius, "For I hold His very thoughts,
The meaning of the mind of Him!" — nay, more
The ingenuities, each active force
That turning in a circle on itself
Looks neither up nor down but keeps the spot,
Mere creature-like and, for religion, works,
Works only and works ever, makes and shapes
And changes, still wrings more of good from less,
Still stamps some bad out, where was worst before,
So leaves the handiwork, the act and deed,
Were it but house and land and wealth, to show
Here was a creature perfect in the kind —
Whether as bee, beaver, or behemoth,
What 's the importance? he has done his work
For work's sake, worked well, earned a creature's praise; —
I say, concede that same fane, whence deploys
Age after age, all this humanity,
Diverse but ever dear, out of the dark
Behind the altar into the broad day
By the portal — enter, and, concede there mocks
Each lover of free motion and much space
A perplexed length of apse and aisle and nave, —
Pillared roof and carved screen, and what care I? —
Which irk the movement and impede the march, —
Nay, possibly, bring flat upon his nose
At some odd breakneck angle, by some freak
Of old-world artistry, that personage
Who, could he but have kept his skirts from grief
And catching at the hooks and crooks about,
Had stepped out on the daylight of our time
Plainly the man of the age, — still, still, I bar
Excessive conflagration in the case.

"Shake the flame freely!" shout the multitude:
The architect approves I stuck my torch
Inside a good stout lantern, hung its light
Above the hooks and crooks, and ended so.
To save society was well: the means
Whereby to save it, — there begins the doubt
Permitted you, imperative on me;
Were mine the best means? Did I work aright
With powers appointed me? — since powers denied
Concern me nothing.

Well, my work reviewed
Fairly, leaves more hope than discouragement.
First, there 's the deed done: what I found, I leave, —
What tottered, I kept stable: if it stand
One month, without sustainment, still thank me
The twenty years' sustainer! Now, observe,
Sustaining is no brilliant self-display
Like knocking down or even setting up:
Much bustle these necessitate; and still
To vulgar eye, the mightier of the myth
Is Hercules, who substitutes his own
For Atlas' shoulder and supports the globe
A whole day, — not the passive and obscure
Atlas who bore, ere Hercules was born,
And is to go on bearing that same load
When Hercules turns ash on Œta's top.
'T is the transition-stage, the tug and strain,
That strike men: standing still is stupid-like.
My pressure was too constant on the whole
For any part's eruption into space
'Mid sparkles, crackling, and much praise of me.
I saw that, in the ordinary life,
Many of the little make a mass of men
Important beyond greatness here and there;
As certainly as, in life exceptional,
When old things terminate and new commence,
A solitary great man 's worth the world.
God takes the business into His own hands
At such time: who creates the novel flower
Contrives to guard and give it breathing-room:
I merely tend the cornfield, care for crop,
And weed no acre thin to let emerge
What prodigy may stifle there perchance,
— No, though my eye have noted where he lurks.
Oh those mute myriads that spoke loud to me —

The eyes that craved to see the light, the mouths
That sought the daily bread and nothing more,
The hands that supplicated exercise,
Men that had wives, and women that had babes,
And all these making suit to only live!
Was I to turn aside from husbandry,
Leave hope of harvest for the corn, my care,
To play at horticulture, rear some rose
Or poppy into perfect leaf and bloom
When, 'mid the furrows, up was pleased to sprout
Some man, cause, system, special interest
I ought to study, stop the world meanwhile?
"But I am Liberty, Philanthropy,
Enlightenment, or Patriotism, the power
Whereby you are to stand or fall!" cries each:
"Mine and mine only be the flag you flaunt!"
And, when I venture to object, "Meantime,
What of yon myriads with no flag at all —
My crop which, who flaunts flag must tread across?"
"Now, this it is to have a puny mind!"
Admire my mental prodigies: "down — down —
Ever at home o' the level and the low,
There bides he brooding! Could he look above,
With less of the owl and more of the eagle eye,
He 'd see there 's no way helps the little cause
Like the attainment of the great. Dare first
The chief emprise; dispel yon cloud between
The sun and us; nor fear that, though our heads
Find earlier warmth and comfort from his ray,
What lies about our feet, the multitude,
Will fail of benefaction presently.
Come now, let each of us awhile cry truce
To special interests, make common cause
Against the adversary — or perchance
Mere dullard to his own plain interest!
Which of us will you choose? — since needs must be
Some one o' the warring causes you incline
To hold, i' the main, has right and should prevail:
Why not adopt and give it prevalence?
Choose strict Faith or lax Incredulity, —
King, Caste, and Cultus — or the Rights of Man,
Sovereignty of each Proudhon o'er himself,
And all that follows in just consequence!
Go free the stranger from a foreign yoke;
Or stay, concentrate energy at home;
Succeed! — when he deserves, the stranger will.

Comply with the Great Nation's impulse, print
By force of arms, — since reason pleads in vain,
And, 'mid the sweet compulsion, pity weeps, —
Hohenstiel-Schwangau on the universe!
Snub the Great Nation, cure the impulsive itch
With smartest fillip on a restless nose
Was ever launched by thumb and finger! Bid
Hohenstiel-Schwangau first repeal the tax
On pig-tails and pomatum, and then mind
Abstruser matters for next century!
Is your choice made? Why then, act up to choice!
Leave the illogical touch now here now there
I' the way of work, the tantalizing help
First to this, then the other opposite:
The blowing hot and cold, sham policy,
Sure ague of the mind and nothing more,
Disease of the perception or the will,
That fain would hide in a fine name! Your choice,
Speak it out and condemn yourself thereby!"

Well, Leicester Square is not the Residenz:
Instead of shrugging shoulder, turning friend
The deaf ear, with a wink to the police —
I 'll answer — by a question, wisdom's mode.
How many years, o' the average, do men
Live in this world? Some score, say computists.
Quintuple me that term and give mankind
The likely hundred, and with all my heart
I 'll take your task upon me, work your way,
Concentrate energy on some one cause:
Since, counseller, I also have my cause,
My flag, my faith in its effect, my hope
In its eventual triumph for the good
O' the world. And once upon a time, when I
Was like all you, mere voice and nothing more,
Myself took wings, soared sunward, and thence sang,
"Look where I live i' the loft, come up to me,
Groundlings, nor grovel longer! gain this height,
And prove you breathe here better than below!
Why, what emancipation far and wide
Will follow in a trice! They too can soar,
Each tenant of the earth's circumference
Claiming to elevate humanity,
They also must attain such altitude,
Live in the luminous circle that surrounds
The planet, not the leaden orb itself

Press out, each point, from surface to yon verge
Which one has gained and guaranteed your realm!"
Ay, still my fragments wander, music-fraught,
Sighs of the soul, mine once, mine now, and mine
Forever! Crumbled arch, crushed aqueduct,
Alive with tremors in the shaggy growth
Of wild-wood, crevice-sown, that triumphs there
Imparting exultation to the hills!
Sweep of the swathe when only the winds walk
And waft my words above the grassy sea
Under the blinding blue that basks o'er Rome, —
Hear ye not still — "Be Italy again"?
And ye, what strikes the panic to your heart?
Decrepit council-chambers, — where some lamp
Drives the unbroken black three paces off
From where the graybeards huddle in debate,
Dim cowls and capes, and midmost glimmers one
Like tarnished gold, and what they say is doubt,
And what they think is fear, and what suspends
The breath in them is not the plaster-patch
Time disengages from the painted wall
Where Rafael moulderingly bids adieu,
Nor tick of the insect turning tapestry
Which a queen's finger traced of old, to dust;
But some word, resonant, redoubtable,
Of who once felt upon his head a hand
Whereof the head now apprehends his foot.
"Light in Rome, Law in Rome, and Liberty
O' the soul in Rome — the free Church, the free State!
Stamp out the nature that 's best typified
By its embodiment in Peter's Dome,
The scorpion-body with the greedy pair
Of outstretched nippers, either colonnade
Agape for the advance of heads and hearts!"
There 's one cause for you! one and only one,
For I am vocal through the universe,
I' the workshop, manufactory, exchange
And market-place, sea-port and custom-house
O' the frontier: listen if the echoes die —
"Unfettered commerce! Power to speak and hear,
And print and read! The universal vote!
Its rights for labor!" This, with much beside,
I spoke when I was voice and nothing more,
But altogether such an one as you
My censors. "Voice, and nothing more, indeed!"
Re-echoes round me: "that 's the censure, there 's

involved the ruin of you soon or late!
Voice, — when its promise beat the empty air:
And nothing more, — when solid earth 's your stage,
And we desiderate performance, deed
For word, the realizing all you dreamed
In the old days: now, for deed, we find at door
O' the council-chamber posted, mute as mouse,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, sentry and safeguard
O' the graybeards all a-chuckle, cowl to cape,
Who challenge Judas, — that 's endearment's style, —
To stop their mouths or let escape grimace,
While they keep cursing Italy and him.
The power to speak, hear, print and read is ours?
Ay, we learn where and how, when clapped inside
A convict-transport bound for cool Cayenne!
The universal vote we have: its urn,
We also have where votes drop, fingered-o'er
By the universal Prefect. Say, Trade 's free
And Toil turned master out o' the slave it was:
What then? These feed man's stomach, but his soul
Craves finer fare, nor lives by bread alone,
As somebody says somewhere. Hence you stand
Proved and recorded either false or weak,
Faulty in promise or performance: which?"
Neither, I hope. Once pedestalled on earth,
To act not speak, I found earth was not air.
I saw that multitude of mine, and not
The nakedness and nullity of air
Fit only for a voice to float in free.
Such eyes I saw that craved the light alone,
Such mouths that wanted bread and nothing else,
Such hands that supplicated handiwork,
Men with the wives, and women with the babes,
Yet all these pleading just to live, not die!
Did I believe one whit less in belief,
Take truth for falsehood, wish the voice revoked
That told the truth to heaven for earth to hear?
No, this should be, and shall; but when and how?
At what expense to these who average
Your twenty years of life, my computists?
"Not bread alone," but bread before all else
For these: the bodily want serve first, said I;
If earth-space and the lifetime help not here,
Where is the good of body having been?
But, helping body, if we somewhat balk
The soul of finer fare, such food 's to find

Elsewhere and afterward — all indicates,
Even this selfsame fact that soul can starve
Yet body still exist its twenty years:
While, stint the body, there 's an end at once
O' the revel in the fancy that Rome 's free,
And superstition 's fettered, and one prints
Whate'er one pleases, and who pleases reads
The same, and speaks out and is spoken to,
And divers hundred thousand fools may vote
A vote untampered with by one wise man,
And so elect Barabbas deputy
In lieu of his concurrent. I who trace
The purpose written on the face of things,
For my behoof and guidance — (whoso needs
No such sustainment, sees beneath my signs,
Proves, what I take for writing, penmanship,
Scribble and flourish with no sense for me
O' the sort I solemnly go spelling out, —
Let him! there 's certain work of mine to show
Alongside his work: which gives warranty
Of shrewder vision in the workman — judge!)
I who trace Providence without a break
I' the plan of things, drop plumb on this plain print
Of an intention with a view to good,
That man is made in sympathy with man
At outset of existence, so to speak;
But in dissociation, more and more,
Man from his fellow, as their lives advance
In culture; still humanity, that 's born
A mass, keeps flying off, fining away
Ever into a multitude of points,
And ends in isolation, each from each:
Peerless above i' the sky, the pinnacle, —
Absolute contact, fusion, all below
At the base of being. How comes this about?
This stamp of God characterizing man
And nothing else but man in the universe —
That, while he feels with man (to use man's speech)
I' the little things of life, its fleshly wants
Of food and rest and health and happiness,
Its simplest spirit-motions, loves and hates,
Hopes, fears, soul-cravings on the ignoblest scale,
O' the fellow-creature, — owns the bond at base, —
He tends to freedom and divergency
In the upward progress, plays the pinnacle
When life 's at greatest (grant again the phrase!

Because there 's neither great nor small in life).
"Consult thou for thy kind that have the eyes
To see, the mouths to eat, the hands to work,
Men with the wives, and women with the babes!"
Prompts Nature. "Care thou for thyself alone
I' the conduct of the mind God made thee with!
Think, as if man had never thought before!
Act, as if all creation hung attent
On the acting of such faculty as thine,
To take prime pattern from thy masterpiece!"
Nature prompts also: neither law obeyed
To the uttermost by any heart and soul
We know or have in record: both of them
Acknowledged blindly by whatever man
We ever knew or heard of in this world.
"Will you have why and wherefore, and the fact
Made plain as pikestaff?" modern Science asks.
"That mass man sprung from was a jelly-lump
Once on a time; he kept an after-course
Through fish and insect, reptile, bird and beast,
Till he attained to be an ape at last
Or last but one. And if this doctrine shock
In aught the natural pride" . . . Friend, banish fear,
The natural humility replies.
Do you suppose, even I, poor potentate,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, who once ruled the roast, —
I was born able at all points to ply
My tools? or did I have to learn my trade,
Practise as exile ere perform as prince?
The world knows something of my ups and downs:
But grant me time, give me the management
And manufacture of a model me,
Me fifty-fold, a prince without a flaw, —
Why, there 's no social grade, the sordidest,
My embryo potentate should blink and 'scape.
King, all the better he was cobbler once,
He should know, sitting on the throne, how tastes
Life to who sweeps the doorway. But life 's hard,
Occasion rare; you cut probation short,
And, being half-instructed, on the stage
You shuffle through your part as best you can,
And bless your stars, as I do. God takes time.
I like the thought He should have lodged me once
I' the hole, the cave, the hut, the tenement,
The mansion and the palace; made me learn
The feel o' the first, before I found myself

Loftier i' the last, not more emancipate ;
From first to last of lodging, I was I,
And not at all the place that harbored me.
Do I refuse to follow farther yet
I' the backwardness, repine if tree and flower,
Mountain or streamlet were my dwelling-place
Before I gained enlargement, grew mollusk ?
As well account that way for many a thrill
Of kinship, I confess to, with the powers
Called Nature : animate, inanimate,
In parts or in the whole, there 's something there
Man-like that somehow meets the man in me.
My pulse goes altogether with the heart
O' the Persian, that old Xerxes, when he stayed
His march to conquest of the world, a day
I' the desert, for the sake of one superb
Plane-tree which queened it there in solitude :
Giving her neck its necklace, and each arm
Its armlet, suiting soft waist, snowy side,
With cincture and apparel. Yes, I lodged
In those successive tenements ; perchance
Taste yet the straitness of them while I stretch
Limb and enjoy new liberty the more.
And some abodes are lost or ruinous ;
Some, patched-up and pieced-out, and so transformed
They still accommodate the traveller
His day of lifetime. Oh you count the links,
Descry no bar of the unbroken man ?
Yes, — and who welds a lump of ore, suppose
He likes to make a chain and not a bar,
And reach by link on link, link small, link large,
Out to the due length — why, there 's forethought still
Outside o' the series, forging at one end,
While at the other there 's — no matter what
The kind of critical intelligence
Believing that last link had last but one
For parent, and no link was, first of all,
Fitted to anvil, hammered into shape.
Else, I accept the doctrine, and deduce
This duty, that I recognize mankind,
In all its height and depth and length and breadth.
Mankind i' the main have little wants, not large :
I, being of will and power to help, i' the main,
Mankind, must help the least wants first. My friend,
That is, my foe, without such power and will,
May plausibly concentrate all he wields,

And do his best at helping some large want,
Exceptionally noble cause, that 's seen
Subordinate enough from where I stand.
As he helps, I helped once, when like himself,
Unable to help better, work more wide;
And so would work with heart and hand to-day,
Did only computists confess a fault,
And multiply the single score by five,
Five only, give man's life its hundred years.
Change life, in me shall follow change to match!
Time were then, to work here, there, everywhere,
By turns and try experiment at ease!
Full time to mend as well as mar: why wait
The slow and sober uprise all around
O' the building? Let us run up, right to roof,
Some sudden marvel, piece of perfectness,
And testify what we intend the whole!
Is the world losing patience? "Wait!" say we:
"There 's time: no generation needs to die
Unsolaced; you 've a century in store!"
But, no: I sadly let the voices wing
Their way i' the upper vacancy, nor test
Truth on this solid as I promised once.
Well, and what is there to be sad about?
The world 's the world, life 's life, and nothing else.
'T is part of life, a property to prize,
That those o' the higher sort engaged i' the world,
Should fancy they can change its ill to good,
Wrong to right, ugliness to beauty: find
Enough success in fancy turning fact,
To keep the sanguine kind in countenance
And justify the hope that busies them:
Failure enough, — to who can follow change
Beyond their vision, see new good prove ill
I' the consequence, see blacks and whites of life
Shift square indeed, but leave the checkered face
Unchanged i' the main, — failure enough for such,
To bid ambition keep the whole from change,
As their best service. I hope nought beside.
No, my brave thinkers, whom I recognize,
Gladly, myself the first, as, in a sense,
All that our world 's worth, flower and fruit of man!
Such minds myself award supremacy
Over the common insignificance,
When only Mind 's in question, — Body bows
To quite another government, you know.

Be Kant crowned king o' the castle in the air!
Hans Slouch — his own, and children's mouths to feed
I' the hovel on the ground — wants meat, nor chews
"The Critique of Pure Reason" in exchange.
But, now, — suppose I could allow your claims
And quite change life to please you, — would it please?
Would life comport with change and still be life?
Ask, now, a doctor for a remedy:
There 's his prescription. Bid him point you out
Which of the five or six ingredients saves
The sick man. "Such the efficacity?
Then why not dare and do things in one dose
Simple and pure, all virtue, no alloy
Of the idle drop and powder?" What 's his word?
The efficacity, neat, were neutralized:
It wants dispersing and retarding, — nay,
Is put upon its mettle, plays its part
Precisely through such hindrance everywhere,
Finds some mysterious give and take i' the case,
Some gain by opposition, he foregoes
Should he unfetter the medicament.
So with this thought of yours that fain would work
Free in the world: it wants just what it finds —
The ignorance, stupidity, the hate,
Envy and malice and uncharitableness
That bar your passage, break the flow of you
Down from those happy heights where many a cloud
Combined to give you birth and bid you be
The royalest of rivers: on you glide
Silverly till you reach the summit-edge,
Then over, on to all that ignorance,
Stupidity, hate, envy, bluffs and blocks,
Posted to fret you into foam and noise.
What of it? Up you mount in minute mist,
And bridge the chasm that crushed your quietude,
A spirit-rainbow, earthborn jewelry
Outsparkling the insipid firmament
Blue above Terni and its orange-trees.
Do not mistake me! You, too, have your rights!
Hans must not burn Kant's house above his head
Because he cannot understand Kant's book:
And still less must Hans' pastor burn Kant's self
Because Kant understands some books too well.
But, justice seen to on this little point,
Answer me, is it manly, is it sage
To stop and struggle with arrangements here

It took so many lives, so much of toil,
To tinker up into efficiency?
Can't you contrive to operate at once, —
Since time is short and art is long, — to show
Your quality i' the world, whate'er you boast,
Without this fractious call on folks to crush
The world together just to set you free,
Admire the capers you will cut perchance,
Nor mind the mischief to your neighbors?

"Age!
Age and experience bring discouragement,"
You taunt me: I maintain the opposite.
Am I discouraged who — perceiving health,
Strength, beauty, as they tempt the eye of soul,
Are uncombinable with flesh and blood —
Resolve to let my body live its best,
And leave my soul what better yet may be
Or not be, in this life or afterward?
— In either fortune, wiser than who waits
Till magic art procure a miracle.
In virtue of my very confidence
Mankind ought to outgrow its babyhood;
I prescribe rocking, deprecate rough hands,
While thus the cradle holds it past mistake.
Indeed, my task 's the harder — equable
Sustainment everywhere, all strain, no push —
Whereby friends credit me with indolence,
Apathy, hesitation. "Stand stock-still
If able to move briskly? 'All a-strain' —
So must we compliment your passiveness?
Sound asleep, rather!"

Just the judgment passed
Upon a statue, luckless like myself,
I saw at Rome once! 'T was some artist's whim
To cover all the accessories close
I' the group, and leave you only Laocoön
With neither sons nor serpents to denote
The purpose of his gesture. Then a crowd
Was called to try the question, criticise
Wherefore such energy of legs and arms,
Nay, eyeballs, starting from the socket. One —
I give him leave to write my history —
Only one said, "I think the gesture strives
Against some obstacle we cannot see."

All the rest made their minds up. "'T is a yawn
Of sheer fatigue subsiding to repose:
The statue 's 'Somnolency' clear enough!"

There, my arch stranger-friend, my audience both
And arbitress, you have one half your wish,
At least: you know the thing I tried to do!
All, so far, to my praise and glory — all
Told as befits the self-apologist, —
Who ever promises a candid sweep
And clearance of those errors miscalled crimes
None knows more, none laments so much as he,
And ever rises from confession, proved
A god whose fault was — trying to be man.
Just so, fair judge, — if I read smile aright —
I condescend to figure in your eyes
As biggest heart and best of Europe's friends,
And hence my failure. God will estimate
Success one day; and, in the mean time — you!

I daresay there 's some fancy of the sort
Frolicking round this final puff I send
To die up yonder in the ceiling-rose, —
Some consolation-stakes, we losers win!
A plague of the return to "I — I — I
Did this, meant that, hoped, feared the other thing!"
Autobiography, adieu! The rest
Shall make amends, be pure blame, history
And falsehood: not the ineffective truth,
But Thiers-and-Victor-Hugo exercise.
Hear what I never was, but might have been
I' the better world where goes tobacco-smoke!
Here lie the dozen volumes of my life:
(Did I say "lie"? the pregnant word will serve.)
Cut on to the concluding chapter, though!
Because the little hours begin to strike.
Hurry Thiers-Hugo to the labor's end!

Something like this the unwritten chapter reads.

Exemplify the situation thus!
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, being, no dispute,
Absolute mistress, chose the Assembly, first,
To serve her: chose this man, its President
Afterward, to serve also, — specially
To see that folk did service one and all.

And now the proper term of years was out,
When the Head-servant must vacate his place;
And nothing lay so patent to the world
As that his fellow-servants one and all
Were — mildly to make mention — knaves or fools,
Each of them with his promise flourished full
I' the face of you by word and impudence,
Or filtered slyly out by nod and wink
And nudge upon your sympathetic rib —
That not one minute more did knave or fool
Mean to keep faith and serve as he had sworn
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, once her Head away.
Why should such swear except to get the chance,
When time should ripen and confusion bloom,
Of putting Hohenstielers-Schwangauese
To the true use of human property —
Restoring souls and bodies, this to Pope,
And that to King, that other to his planned
Perfection of a Share-and-share-alike,
That other still, to Empire absolute
In shape of the Head-servant's very self
Transformed to Master whole and sole? each scheme
Discussible, concede one circumstance —
That each scheme's parent were, beside himself,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, not her serving-man
Sworn to do service in the way she chose
Rather than his way: way superlative,
Only, — by some infatuation, — his
And his and his and everyone's but hers
Who stuck to just the Assembly and the Head.
I make no doubt the Head, too, had his dream
Of doing sudden duty swift and sure
On all that heap of untrustworthiness —
Catching each vaunter of the villany
He meant to perpetrate when time was ripe,
Once the Head-servant fairly out of doors, —
And, caging here a knave and there a fool,
Cry, "Mistress of your servants, these and me,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau! I, their trusty Head,
Pounce on a pretty scheme concocting here
That's stopped, extinguished by my vigilance.
Your property is safe again: but mark!
Safe in these hands, not yours, who lavish trust
Too lightly. Leave my hands their charge awhile!
I know your business better than yourself:
Let me alone about it! Some fine day,

Once we are rid of the embarrassment,
You shall look up and see your longings crowned!"
Such fancy might have tempted him be false,
But this man chose truth and was wiser so.
He recognized that for great minds i' the world
There is no trial like the appropriate one
Of leaving little minds their liberty
Of littleness to blunder on through life,
Now aiming at right ends by foolish means,
Now, at absurd achievement through the aid
Of good and wise endeavor — to acquiesce
In folly's life-long privilege, though with power
To do the little minds the good they need,
Despite themselves, by just abolishing
Their right to play the part and fill the place
I' the scheme of things He schemed who made alike
Great minds and little minds, saw use for each.
Could the orb sweep those puny particles
It just half-lights at distance, hardly leads
I' the leash — sweep out each speck of them from space
They anticise in with their days and nights
And whirlings round and dancings off, forsooth,
And all that fruitless individual life
One cannot lend a beam to but they spoil —
Sweep them into itself and so, one star,
Preponderate henceforth i' the heritage
Of heaven! No! in less senatorial phrase,
The man endured to help, not save outright
The multitude by substituting him
For them, his knowledge, will and way, for God's:
Nor change the world, such as it is, and was
And will be, for some other, suiting all
Except the purpose of the maker. No!
He saw that weakness, wickedness will be,
And therefore should be: that the perfect man,
As we account perfection — at most pure
O' the special gold, whate'er the form it take,
Head-work or heart-work, fined and thrice-refined
I' the crucible of life, whereto the powers
Of the refiner, one and all, are flung
To feed the flame, he saw that e'en the block,
Such perfect man holds out triumphant, breaks
Into some poisonous ore, gold's opposite,
At the very purest, so compensating
Man's Adversary — what if we believe?
For earlier stern exclusion of his stuff.

See the sage, with the hunger for the truth,
And see his system that 's all true, except
The one weak place that 's stanchioned by a lie!
The moralist, who walks with head erect
I' the crystal clarity of air so long,
Until a stumble, and the man 's one mire!
Philanthropy undoes the social knot
With axe-edge, makes love room 'twixt head and trunk:
Religion — but, enough, the thing 's too clear!
Well, if these sparks break out i' the greenest tree,
Our topmost of performance, yours and mine,
What will be done i' the dry ineptitude
Of ordinary mankind, bark and bole,
All seems ashamed of but their mother-earth?
Therefore throughout Head's term of servitude
He did the appointed service, and forbore
Extraneous action that were duty else,
Done by some other servant, idle now
Or mischievous: no matter, each his own —
Own task, and, in the end, own praise or blame!
He suffered them strut, prate, and brag their best,
Squabble at odds on every point save one,
And there shake hands, — agree to trifle time,
Obstruct advance with, each, his cricket-cry,
"Wait till the Head be off the shoulders here!
Then comes my King, my Pope, my Autocrat,
My Socialist Republic to her own —
To-wit, that property of only me,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau who conceits herself
Free, forsooth, and expects I keep her so!"
— Nay, suffered when, perceiving with dismay
Head's silence paid no tribute to their noise,
They turned on him. "Dumb menace in that mouth,
Malice in that unstridulosity!
He cannot but intend some stroke of state
Shall signalize his passage into peace
Out of the creaking, — hinder transference
O' the Hohenstielers-Schwangauese to king,
Pope, autocrat, or socialist republic! That 's
Exact the cause his lips unlocked would cry!
Therefore be stirring: brave, beard, bully him!
Dock, by the million, of its friendly joints,
The electoral body short at once! who did,
May do again, and undo us beside;
Wrest from his hands the sword for self-defence,
The right to parry any thrust in play

We peradventure please to meditate!"
And so forth; creak, creak, creak: and ne'er a line
His locked mouth oped the wider, till at last
O' the long degraded and insulting day,
Sudden the clock told it was judgment-time.
Then he addressed himself to speak indeed
To the fools, not knaves: they saw him walk straight down
Each step of the eminence, as he first engaged,
And stand at last o' the level, — all he swore.
"People, and not the people's varletry,
This is the task you set myself and these!
Thus I performed my part of it, and thus
They thwarted me throughout, here, here, and here:
Study each instance! yours the loss, not mine.
What they intend now is demonstrable
As plainly: here 's such man, and here 's such mode
Of making you some other than the thing
You, wisely or unwisely, choose to be,
And only set him up to keep you so.
Do you approve this? Yours the loss, not mine.
Do you condemn it? There 's a remedy.
Take me — who know your mind, and mean your good,
With clearer brain and stouter arm than they,
Or you, or haply anybody else —
And make me master for the moment! Choose
What time, what power you trust me with: I too
Will choose as frankly ere I trust myself
With time and power: they must be adequate
To the end and aim, since mine the loss, with yours,
If means be wanting; once their worth approved,
Grant them, and I shall forthwith operate —
Ponder it well! — to the extremest stretch
O' the power you trust me: if with unsuccess,
God wills it, and there 's nobody to blame."

Whereon the people answered with a shout,
"The trusty one! no tricksters any more!"
How could they other? He was in his place.

What followed? Just what he foresaw, what proved
The soundness of both judgments, — his, o' the knaves
And fools, each trickster with his dupe, — and theirs,
The people's, in what head and arm could help.
There was uprising, masks dropped, flags unfurled,
Weapons outflourished in the wind, my faith!
Heavily did he let his fist fall plumb

On each perturber of the public peace,
No matter whose the wagging head it broke —
From bald-pate craft and greed and impudence
Of night-hawk at first chance to prowl and prey
For glory and a little gain beside,
Passing for eagle in the dusk of the age, —
To florid head-top, foamy patriotism
And tribunitial daring, breast laid bare
Through confidence in rectitude, with hand
On private pistol in the pocket: these
And all the dupes of these, who lent themselves
As dust and feather do, to help offence
O' the wind that whirls them at you, then subsides
In safety somewhere, leaving filth afloat,
Annoyance you may brush from eyes and beard, —
These he stopped: bade the wind's spite howl or whine
Its worst outside the building, wind conceives
Meant to be pulled together and become
Its natural playground so. What foolishness
Of dust or feather proved importunate
And fell 'twixt thumb and finger, found them gripe
To detriment of bulk and buoyancy.
Then followed silence and submission. Next,
The inevitable comment came on work
And work's cost: he was censured as profuse
Of human life and liberty: too swift
And thorough his procedure, who had lagged
At the outset, lost the opportunity
Through timid scruples as to right and wrong.
"There 's no such certain mark of a small mind"
(So did Sagacity explain the fault)
"As when it needs must square away and sink
To its own small dimensions, private scale
Of right and wrong, — humanity i' the large,
The right and wrong of the universe, forsooth!
This man addressed himself to guard and guide
Hohenstiel-Schwangau. When the case demands
He frustrate villany in the egg, unhatched,
With easy stamp and minimum of pang
E'en to the punished reptile, 'There 's my oath
Restrains my foot,' objects our guide and guard,
'I must leave guardianship and guidance now:
Rather than stretch one handbreadth of the law,
I am bound to see it break from end to end.
First show me death i' the body politic:
Then prescribe pill and potion, what may please

Hohenstiel-Schwangau! all is for her sake:
'T was she ordained my service should be so.
What if the event demonstrate her unwise,
If she unwill the thing she willed before?
I hold to the letter and obey the bond
And leave her to perdition loyally.'
Whence followed thrice the expenditure we blame
Of human life and liberty: for want
O' the by-blow, came deliberate butcher's-work!"
"Elsewhere go carry your complaint!" bade he.
"Least, largest, there 's one law for all the minds,
Here or above: be true at any price!
'T is just o' the great scale, that such happy stroke
Of falsehood would be found a failure. Truth
Still stands unshaken at her base by me,
Reigns paramount i' the world, for the large good
O' the long late generations, — I and you
Forgotten like this buried foolishness!
Not so the good I rooted in its grave."

This is why he refused to break his oath,
Rather appealed to the people, gained the power
To act as he thought best, then used it, once
For all, no matter what the consequence
To knaves and fools. As thus began his sway,
So, through its twenty years, one rule of right
Sufficed him: govern for the many first,
The poor mean multitude, all mouths and eyes:
Bid the few, better favored in the brain,
Be patient, nor presume on privilege,
Help him or else be quiet, — never crave
That he help them, — increase, forsooth, the gulf
Yawning so terribly 'twixt mind and mind
I' the world here, which his purpose was to block
At bottom, were it by an inch, and bridge,
If by a filament, no more, at top.
Equalize things a little! And the way
He took to work that purpose out, was plain
Enough to intellect and honesty
And — superstition, style it if you please,
So long as you allow there was no lack
O' the quality imperative in man —
Reverence. You see deeper? thus saw he,
And by the light he saw, must walk: how else
Was he to do his part? a man's, with might
And main, and not a faintest touch of fear,

Sure he was in the hand of God who comes
Before and after, with a work to do
Which no man helps nor hinders. Thus the man, —
So timid when the business was to touch
The uncertain order of humanity,
Imperil, for a problematic cure
Of grievance on the surface, any good
I' the deep of things, dim yet discernible, —
This same man, so irresolute before,
Show him a true excrescence to cut sheer,
A devil's graft on God's foundation-stock,
Then — no complaint of indecision more!
He wrenched out the whole canker, root and branch,
Deaf to who cried that earth would tumble in
At its four corners if he touched a twig.
Witness that lie of lies, arch-infamy,
When the Republic, with her life involved
In just this law — "Each people rules itself
Its own way, not as any stranger please" —
Turned, and for first proof she was living, bade
Hohenstiel-Schwangau fasten on the throat
Of the first neighbor that claimed benefit
O' the law herself established: "Hohenstiel
For Hohenstielers! Rome, by parity
Of reasoning, for Romans? That 's a jest
Wants proper treatment, — lancet-puncture suits
The proud flesh: Rome ape Hohenstiel forsooth!"
And so the siege and slaughter and success
Whereof we nothing doubt that Hohenstiel
Will have to pay the price, in God's good time,
Which does not always fall on Saturday
When the world looks for wages. Anyhow,
He found this infamy triumphant. Well:
Sagacity suggested, make this speech!
"The work was none of mine: suppose wrong wait,
Stand over for redressing? Mine for me,
My predecessors' work on their own head!
Meantime, there 's plain advantage, should we leave
Things as we find them. Keep Rome manacled
Hand and foot: no fear of unruliness!
Her foes consent to even seem our friends
So long, no longer. Then, there 's glory got
By boldness and bravado to the world:
The disconcerted world must grin and bear
The old saucy writing, — 'Grunt thereat who may,
So shall things be, for such my pleasure is —

Hohenstiel-Schwangau's.' How that reads in Rome,
I' the capitol where Brennus broke his pate,
And lends a flourish to our journalists!"
Only, it was nor read nor flourished of,
Since, not a moment did such glory stay
Excision of the canker! Out it came,
Root and branch, with much roaring, and some blood,
And plentiful abuse of him from friend
And foe. Who cared? Not Nature, who assuaged
The pain and set the patient on his legs
Promptly: the better! had it been the worse,
'T is Nature you must try conclusions with,
Not he, since nursing canker kills the sick
For certain, while to cut may cure, at least.
"Ah," groaned a second time Sagacity,
"Again the little mind, precipitate,
Rash, rude, when even in the right, as here!
The great mind knows the power of gentleness,
Only tries force because persuasion fails.
Had this man, by prelusive trumpet-blast,
Signified, 'Truth and Justice mean to come,
Nay, fast approach your threshold! Ere they knock,
See that the house be set in order, swept
And garnished, windows shut, and doors thrown wide!
The free State comes to visit the free Church:
Receive her! or . . . or . . . never mind what else!'
Thus moral suasion heralding brute force,
How had he seen the old abuses die,
And new life kindle here, there, everywhere,
Roused simply by that mild yet potent spell —
Beyond or beat of drum or stroke of sword —
Public opinion!"

"How, indeed?" he asked,
"When all to see, after some twenty years,
Were your own fool-face waiting for the sight,
Faced by as wide a grin from ear to ear
O' the knaves who, while the fools were waiting, worked —
Broke yet another generation's heart —
Twenty years' respite helping! Teach your nurse
'Compliance with, before you suck, the teat!'
Find what that means, and meanwhile hold your tongue!"

Whereof the war came which he knew must be.

Now, this had proved the dry-rot of the race
He ruled o'er, that, i' the old day, when was need

They fought for their own liberty and life,
Well did they fight, none better: whence, such love
Of fighting somehow still for fighting's sake
Against no matter whose the liberty
And life, so long as self-conceit should crow
And clap the wing, while justice sheathed her claw, —
That what had been the glory of the world
When thereby came the world's good, grew its plague
Now that the champion-armor, donned to dare
The dragon once, was clattered up and down
Highway and by-path of the world at peace,
Merely to mask marauding, or for sake
O' the shine and rattle that apprised the fields
Hohenstiel-Schwangau was a fighter yet,
And would be, till the weary world suppressed
Her peccant humors out of fashion now.
Accordingly the world spoke plain at last,
Promised to punish who next played with fire.

So, at his advent, such discomfiture
Taking its true shape of beneficence,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, half-sad and part-wise,
Sat: if with wistful eye reverting oft
To each pet weapon, rusty on its peg,
Yet, with a sigh of satisfaction too
That, peacefulness become the law, herself
Got the due share of godsends in its train,
Cried shame and took advantage quietly.
Still, so the dry-rot had been nursed into
Blood, bones and marrow, that, from worst to best,
All, — clearest brains and soundest hearts save here, —
All had this lie acceptable for law
Plain as the sun at noonday — "War is best,
Peace is worst; peace we only tolerate
As needful preparation for new war:
War may be for whatever end we will —
Peace only as the proper help thereto.
Such is the law of right and wrong for us
Hohenstiel-Schwangau: for the other world,
As naturally, quite another law.
Are we content? The world is satisfied.
Discontent? Then the world must give us leave
To strike right, left, and exercise our arm
Torpid of late through overmuch repose,
And show its strength is still superlative
At somebody's expense in life or limb:

Which done, — let peace succeed and last a year!"
Such devil's-doctrine so was judged God's law,
We say, when this man stepped upon the stage,
That it had seemed a venial fault at most
Had he once more obeyed Sagacity.
"You come i' the happy interval of peace,
The favorable weariness from war:
Prolong it! artfully, as if intent
On ending peace as soon as possible.
Quietly so increase the sweets of ease
And safety, so employ the multitude,
Put hod and trowel so in idle hands,
So stuff and stop up wagging jaws with bread,
That selfishness shall surreptitiously
Do wisdom's office, whisper in the ear
Of Hohenstiel-Schwangau, there 's a pleasant feel
In being gently forced down, pinioned fast
To the easy arm-chair by the pleading arms
O' the world beseeching her to there abide
Content with all the harm done hitherto,
And let herself be petted in return,
Free to re-wage, in speech and prose and verse,
The old unjust wars, nay — in verse and prose
And speech, — to vaunt new victories, shall prove
A plague o' the future, — so that words suffice
For present comfort, and no deeds denote
That — tired of illimitable line on line
Of boulevard-building, tired o' the theatre
With the tuneful thousand in their thrones above,
For glory of the male intelligence,
And Nakedness in her due niche below,
For illustration of the female use —
That she, 'twixt yawn and sigh, prepares to slip
Out of the arm-chair, wants fresh blood again
From over the boundary, to color-up
The sheeny sameness, keep the world aware
Hohenstiel-Schwangau's arm needs exercise
Despite the petting of the universe!
Come, you 're a city-builder: what 's the way
Wisdom takes when time needs that she entice
Some fierce tribe, castled on the mountain-peak,
Into the quiet and amenity
O' the meadow-land below? By crying 'Done
With fight now, down with fortress'? Rather — 'Dare
On, dare ever, not a stone displaced!'
Cries Wisdom: 'Cradle of our ancestors,

Be bulwark, give our children safety still!
Who of our children please may stoop and taste
O' the valley-fatness, unafraid, — for why?
At first alarm they have thy mother-ribs
To run upon for refuge; foes forget
Scarcely that Terror on her vantage-coign,
Couchant supreme among the powers of air,
Watches — prepared to pounce — the country wide!
Meanwhile the encouraged valley holds its own,
From the first hut's adventure in descent,
Half home, half hiding-place, — to dome and spire
Befitting the assured metropolis:
Nor means offence to the fort which caps the crag,
All undismantled of a turret-stone,
And bears the banner-pole that creaks at times
Embarrassed by the old emblazonment,
When festal days are to commemorate:
Otherwise left untenanted, no doubt,
Since, never fear, our myriads from below
Would rush, if needs were, man the walls again,
Renew the exploits of the earlier time
At moment's notice! But till notice sound,
Inhabit we in ease and opulence!'
And so, till one day thus a notice sounds,
Not trumpeted, but in a whisper-gust
Fitfully playing through mute city streets
At midnight weary of day's feast and game —
'Friends, your famed fort's a ruin past repair!
Its use is — to proclaim it had a use
Obsolete long since. Climb and study there
How to paint barbican and battlement
I' the scenes of our new theatre! We fight
Now — by forbidding neighbors to sell steel
Or buy wine, not by blowing out their brains!
Moreover, while we let time sap the strength
O' the walls omnipotent in menace once,
Neighbors would seem to have prepared surprise —
Run up defences in a mushroom-growth,
For all the world like what we boasted: brief —
Hohenstiel-Schwangau's policy is peace!'"

Ay, so Sagacity advised him filch
Folly from fools: handsomely substitute
The dagger o' lath, while gay they sang and danced,
For that long dangerous sword they liked to feel,
Even at feast-time, clink and make friends start.

No! he said: "Hear the truth, and bear the truth,
And bring the truth to bear on all you are
And do, assured that only good comes thence
Whate'er the shape good take! While I have rule,
Understand! — war for war's sake, war for sake
O' the good war gets you as war's sole excuse,
Is damnable and damned shall be. You want
Glory? Why so do I, and so does God.
Where is it found, — in this paraded shame, —
One particle of glory? Once you warred
For liberty against the world, and won:
There was the glory. Now, you fain would war
Because the neighbor prospers overmuch, —
Because there has been silence half-an-hour,
Like Heaven on earth, without a cannon-shot
Announcing Hohenstielers-Schwangauese
Are minded to disturb the jubilee, —
Because the loud tradition echoes faint,
And who knows but posterity may doubt
If the great deeds were ever done at all,
Much less believe, were such to do again,
So the event would follow: therefore, prove
The old power, at the expense of somebody!
Oh, Glory, — gilded bubble, bard and sage
So nickname rightly, — would thy dance endure
One moment, would thy vaunting make believe
Only one eye thy ball was solid gold,
Hadst thou less breath to buoy thy vacancy
Than a whole multitude expends in praise,
Less range for roaming than from head to head
Of a whole people? Flit, fall, fly again,
Only, fix never where the resolute hand
May prick thee, prove the glassy lie thou art!
Give me real intellect to reason with,
No multitude, no entity that apes
One wise man, being but a million fools!
How and whence wishest glory, thou wise one?
Wouldst get it, — didst thyself guide Providence, —
By stinting of his due each neighbor round
In strength and knowledge and dexterity
So as to have thy littleness grow large
By all those somethings once, turned nothings now,
As children make a molehill mountainous
By scooping out a trench around their pile,
And saving so the mudwork from approach?
Quite otherwise the cheery game of life,

True yet mimetic warfare, whereby man
Does his best with his utmost, and so ends
The victor most of all in fair defeat.
Who thinks, — would he have no one think beside?
Who knows, who does, — save his must learning die
And action cease? Why, so our giant proves
No better than a dwarf, once rivalry
Prostrate around him. Let the whole race stand
For him to try conclusions fairly with!
Show me the great man would engage his peer
Rather by grinning 'Cheat, thy gold is brass!'
Than granting 'Perfect piece of purest ore!
Still, is it less good mintage, this of mine?'
Well, and these right and sound results of soul
I' the strong and healthy one wise man, — shall such
Be vainly sought for, scornfully renounced
I' the multitude that make the entity —
The people? — to what purpose, if no less,
In power and purity of soul, below
The reach of the unit than, by multiplied
Might of the body, vulgarized the more,
Above, in thick and threefold brutishness?
See! you accept such one wise man, myself:
Wiser or less wise, still I operate
From my own stock of wisdom, nor exact
Of other sort of natures you admire,
That whoso rhymes a sonnet pays a tax,
Who paints a landscape dips brush at his cost,
Who scores a septett true for strings and wind
Mulcted must be — else how should I impose
Properly, attitudinize aright,
Did such conflicting claims as these divert
Hohenstiel-Schwangau from observing me?
Therefore, what I find facile, you be sure,
With effort or without it, you shall dare —
You, I aspire to make my better self
And truly the Great Nation. No more war
For war's sake, then! and, — seeing, wickedness
Springs out of folly, — no more foolish dread
O' the neighbor waxing too inordinate
A rival, through his gain of wealth and ease!
What? — keep me patient, Powers! — the people here,
Earth presses to her heart, nor owns a pride
Above her pride i' the race all flame and air
And aspiration to the boundless Great,
The incommensurably Beautiful —

Whose very falterings groundward come of flight
Urged by a pinion all too passionate
For heaven and what it holds of gloom and glow:
Bravest of thinkers, bravest of the brave
Doers, exalt in Science, rapturous
In Art, the — more than all — magnetic race
To fascinate their fellows, mould mankind
Hohenstiel-Schwangau-fashion, — these, what? —these
Will have to abdicate their primacy
Should such a nation sell them steel untaxed,
And such another take itself, on hire
For the natural sennight, somebody for lord
Unpatronized by me whose back was turned?
Or such another yet would fain build bridge,
Lay rail, drive tunnel, busy its poor self
With its appropriate fancy: so there 's — flash —
Hohenstiel-Schwangau up in arms at once!
Genius has somewhat of the infantine:
But of the childish, not a touch nor taint
Except through self-will, which, being foolishness,
Is certain, soon or late, of punishment.
Which Providence avert! — and that it may
Avert what both of us would so deserve,
No foolish dread o' the neighbor, I enjoin!
By consequence, no wicked war with him,
While I rule!

"Does that mean — no war at all
When just the wickedness I here proscribe
Comes, haply, from the neighbor? Does my speech
Precede the praying that you beat the sword
To ploughshare, and the spear to pruning-hook,
And sit down henceforth under your own vine
And fig-tree through the sleepy summer month,
Letting what hurly-burly please explode
On the other side the mountain-frontier? No,
Beloved! I foresee and I announce
Necessity of warfare in one case,
For one cause: one way, I bid broach the blood
O' the world. For truth and right, and only right
And truth, — right, truth, on the absolute scale of God,
No pettiness of man's admeasurement, —
In such case only, and for such one cause,
Fight your hearts out, whatever fate betide
Hands energetic to the uttermost!
Lie not! Endure no lie which needs your heart

And hand to push it out of mankind's path —
No lie that lets the natural forces work
Too long ere lay it plain and pulverized —
Seeing man's life lasts only twenty years!
And such a lie, before both man and God,
Proving, at this time present, Austria's rule
O'er Italy, — for Austria's sake the first,
Italy's next, and our sake last of all,
Come with me and deliver Italy!
Smite hip and thigh until the oppressor leave
Free from the Adriatic to the Alps
The oppressed one! We were they who laid her low
In the old bad day when Villany braved Truth
And Right, and laughed 'Henceforward, God deposed,
Satan we set to rule forevermore
I' the world!' — whereof to stop the consequence,
And for atonement of false glory there
Gaped at and gabbled over by the world,
I purpose to get God enthroned again
For what the world will gird at as sheer shame
I' the cost of blood and treasure. 'All for nought —
Not even, say, some patch of province, splice
O' the frontier? — some snug honorarium-fee
Shut into glove and pocketed apace?'
(Questions Sagacity) 'in deference
To the natural susceptibility
Of folks at home, unwitting of that pitch
You soar to, and misdoubting if Truth, Right
And the other such augustnesses repay
Expenditure in coin o' the realm, — but prompt
To recognize the cession of Savoy
And Nice as marketable value!' No,
Sagacity, go preach to Metternich,
And, sermon ended, stay where he resides!
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, you and I must march
The other road! war for the hate of war,
Not love, this once!" So Italy was free.

What else noteworthy and commendable
I' the man's career? — that he was resolute —
No trepidation, much less treachery
On his part, should imperil from its poise
The ball o' the world, heaved up at such expense
Of pains so far, and ready to rebound,
Let but a finger maladroitly fall,
Under pretence of making fast and sure

The inch gained by late volubility,
And run itself back to the ancient rest
At foot o' the mountain. Thus he ruled, gave proof
The world had gained a point, progressive so,
By choice, this time, as will and power concurred,
O' the fittest man to rule; not chance of birth,
Or such-like dice-throw. Oft Sagacity
Was at his ear: "Confirm this clear advance,
Support this wise procedure! You, elect
O' the people, mean to justify their choice
And out-king all the kingly imbeciles;
But that 's just half the enterprise: remains
You find them a successor like yourself,
In head and heart and eye and hand and aim,
Or all done 's undone; and whom hope to mould
So like you as the pupil Nature sends,
The son and heir's completeness which you lack?
Lack it no longer! Wed the pick o' the world,
Where'er you think you find it. Should she be
A queen, — tell Hohenstielers-Schwangauese.
'So do the old enthroned decrepitudes
Acknowledge, in the rotten hearts of them,
Their knell is knolled, they hasten to make peace
With the new order, recognize in me
Your right to constitute what king you will,
Cringe therefore crown in hand and bride on arm,
To both of us: we triumph, I suppose!'
Is it the other sort of rank? — bright eye,
Soft smile, and so forth, all her queenly boast?
Undaunted the exordium — 'I, the man
O' the people, with the people mate myself:
So stand, so fall. Kings, keep your crowns and brides!
Our progeny (if Providence agree)
Shall live to tread the baubles underfoot
And bid the scarecrows consort with their kin.
For son, as for his sire, be the free wife
In the free state!'"

That is, Sagacity
Would prop up one more lie, the most of all
Pernicious fancy that the son and heir
Receives the genius from the sire, himself
Transmits as surely, — ask experience else!
Which answers, — never was so plain a truth
As that God drops his seed of heavenly flame
Just where He wills on earth: sometimes where man

Seems to tempt — such the accumulated store
Of faculties — one spark to fire the heap;
Sometimes where, fire-ball-like, it falls upon
The naked unpreparedness of rock,
Burns, beaconing the nations through their night.
Faculties, fuel for the flame? All helps
Come, ought to come, or come not, crossed by chance,
From culture and transmission. What 's your want
I' the son and heir? Sympathy, aptitude,
Teachableness, the fuel for the flame?
You 'll have them for your pains: but the flame's self,
The novel thought of God shall light the world?
No, poet, though your offspring rhyme and chime
I' the cradle, — painter, no, for all your pet
Draws his first eye, beats Salvatore's boy, —
And thrice no, statesman, should your progeny
Tie bib and tucker with no tape but red,
And make a foolscap-kite of protocols!
Critic and copyist and bureaucrat
To heart's content! The seed o' the apple-tree
Brings forth another tree which bears a crab:
'T is the great gardener grafts the excellence
On wildings where he will.

"How plain I view,
Across those misty years 'twixt me and Rome" —
(Such the man's answer to Sagacity) —
"The little wayside temple, halfway down
To a mild river that makes oxen white
Miraculously, un-mouse-colors skin,
Or so the Roman country people dream!
I view that sweet small shrub-imbedded shrine
On the declivity, was sacred once
To a transmuting Genius of the land,
Could touch and turn its dunnest natures bright,
— Since Italy means the Land of the Ox, we know.
Well, how was it the due succession fell
From priest to priest who ministered i' the cool
Calm fane o' the Clitumnian god? The sire
Brought forth a son and sacerdotal sprout,
Endowed instinctively with good and grace
To suit the gliding gentleness below —
Did he? Tradition tells another tale.
Each priest obtained his predecessor's staff,
Robe, fillet and insignia, blamelessly,
By springing out of ambush, soon or late,

And slaying him: the initiative rite
Simply was murder, save that murder took,
I' the case, another and religious name.
So it was once, is now, shall ever be
With genius and its priesthood in this world:
The new power slays the old — but handsomely.
There he lies, not diminished by an inch
Of stature that he graced the altar with,
Though somebody of other bulk and build
Cries, 'What a goodly personage lies here
Reddening the water where the bulrush roots!
May I conduct the service in his place,
Decently and in order, as did he,
And, as he did not, keep a wary watch
When meditating 'neath yon willow shade!'
Find out your best man, sure the son of him
Will prove best man again, and, better still
Somehow than best, the grandson-prodigy!
You think the world would last another day
Did we so make us masters of the trick
Whereby the works go, we could pre-arrange
Their play and reach perfection when we please?
Depend on it, the change and the surprise
Are part o' the plan: 't is we wish steadiness;
Nature prefers a motion by unrest,
Advancement through this force which jostles that.
And so, since much remains i' the world to see,
Here 's the world still, affording God the sight."
Thus did the man refute Sagacity,
Ever at this old whisper in his ear:
"Here are you picked out, by a miracle,
And placed conspicuously enough, folks say
And you believe, by Providence outright
Taking a new way — nor without success —
To put the world upon its mettle: good!
But Fortune alternates with Providence;
Resource is soon exhausted. Never count
On such a happy hit occurring twice!
Try the old method next time!"

"Old enough,"
(At whisper in his ear, the laugh outbroke,)
"And mode the most discredited of all,
By just the men and women who make boast
They are kings and queens thereby! Mere self-defence
Should teach them, on one chapter of the law

Must be no sort of trifling — chastity:
They stand or fall, as their progenitors
Were chaste or unchaste. Now, run eye around
My crowned acquaintance, give each life its look
And no more, — why, you 'd think each life was led
Purposely for example of what pains
Who leads it took to cure the prejudice,
And prove there 's nothing so unprovable
As who is who, what son of what a sire,
And — inferentially — how faint the chance
That the next generation needs to fear
Another fool o' the selfsame type as he
Happily regnant now by right divine
And luck o' the pillow! No: select your lord
By the direct employment of your brains
As best you may, — bad as the blunder prove,
A far worse evil stank beneath the sun
When some legitimate blockhead managed so
Matters that high time was to interfere,
Though interference came from hell itself
And not the blind mad miserable mob
Happily ruled so long by pillow-luck
And divine right, — by lies in short, not truth.
And meanwhile use the allotted minute . . . ."

One, —
Two, three, four, five — yes, five the pendule warns!
Eh? Why, this wild work wanders past all bound
And bearing! Exile, Leicester Square, the life
I' the old gay miserable time, rehearsed,
Tried on again like cast clothes, still to serve
At a pinch, perhaps? "Who 's who?" was aptly asked,
Since certainly I am not I! since when?
Where is the bud-mouthed arbitress? A nod
Out-Homering Homer! Stay — there flits the clue
I fain would find the end of! Yes, — "Meanwhile,
Use the allotted minute!" Well, you see,
(Veracious and imaginary Thiers,
Who map out thus the life I might have led,
But did not, — all the worse for earth and me, —
Doff spectacles, wipe pen, shut book, decamp!)
You see 't is easy in heroics! Plain
Pedestrian speech shall help me perorate.
Ah, if one had no need to use the tongue!

How obvious and how easy 't is to talk
Inside the soul, a ghostly dialogue —
Instincts with guesses, — instinct, guess, again
With dubious knowledge, half-experience: each
And all the interlocutors alike
Subordinating, — as decorum bids,
Oh, never fear! but still decisively, —
Claims from without that take too high a tone,
—("God wills this, man wants that, the dignity
Prescribed a prince would wish the other thing") —
Putting them back to insignificance
Beside one intimatest fact — myself
Am first to be considered, since I live
Twenty years longer and then end, perhaps!
But, where one ceases to soliloquize,
Somehow the motives, that did well enough
I' the darkness, when you bring them into light
Are found, like those famed cave-fish, to lack eye
And organ for the upper magnitudes.
The other common creatures, of less fine
Existence, that acknowledge earth and heaven,
Have it their own way in the argument.
Yes, forced to speak, one stoops to say — one's aim
Was — what it peradventure should have been:
To renovate a people, mend or end
That bane come of a blessing meant the world —
Inordinate culture of the sense made quick
By soul, — the lust o' the flesh, lust of the eye,
And pride of life, — and, consequent on these,
The worship of that prince o' the power o' the air
Who paints the cloud and fills the emptiness
And bids his votaries, famishing for truth,
Feed on a lie.

Alack, one lies one's self
Even in the stating that one's end was truth,
Truth only, if one states as much in words!
Give me the inner chamber of the soul
For obvious easy argument! 't is there
One pits the silent truth against a lie —
Truth which breaks shell a careless simple bird,
Nor wants a gorget nor a beak filed fine,
Steel spurs and the whole armory o' the tongue,
To equalize the odds. But, do your best,
Words have to come: and somehow words deflect
As the best cannon ever rifled will.

"Deflect" indeed! nor merely words from thoughts
But names from facts: "Clitumnus" did I say?
As if it had been his ox-whitening wave
Whereby folk practised that grim cult of old —
The murder of their temple's priest by who
Would qualify for his succession. Sure —
Nemi was the true lake's style. Dream had need
Of the ox-whitening peace of prettiness
And so confused names, well known once awake.

So, i' the Residenz yet, not Leicester Square,
Alone, — no such congenial intercourse! —
My reverie concludes, as dreaming should,
With daybreak: nothing done and over yet,
Except cigars! The adventure thus may be,
Or never needs to be at all: who knows?
My Cousin-Duke, perhaps, at whose hard head
— Is it, now — is this letter to be launched,
The sight of whose gray oblong, whose grim seal,
Set all these fancies floating for an hour?

Twenty years are good gain, come what come will!
Double or quits! The letter goes! Or stays?

FIFINE AT THE FAIR

[1872]

DONE ELVIRE.

Vous plaît-il, don Juan, nous éclaircir ces beaux mystères ?

DON JUAN.

Madame, à vous dire la vérité . . .

DONE ELVIRE.

Ah ! que vous savez mal vous défendre pour un homme de cour, et qui doit être accoutumé à ces sortes de choses ! J'ai pitié de vous voir la confusion que vous avez. Que ne vous armez-vous le front d'une noble effronterie ? Que ne me jurez-vous que vous êtes toujours dans les mêmes sentimens pour moi, que vous m'aimez toujours avec une ardeur sans égale, et que rien n'est capable de vous détacher de moi que la mort ? — (*Molière, Don Juan*, Act 1ier. Scène 3e.)

DONNA ELVIRA.

Don Juan, might you please to help one give a guess,
Hold up a candle, clear this fine mysteriousness ?

DON JUAN.

Madam, if needs I must declare the truth, — in short . . .

DONNA ELVIRA.

Fie, for a man of mode, accustomed at the court
To such a style of thing, how awkwardly my lord
Attempts defence ! You move compassion, that 's the word —
Dumb-foundered and chapfallen ! Why don't you arm your brow
With noble impudence ? Why don't you swear and vow
No sort of change is come to any sentiment
You ever had for me ? Affection holds the bent,
You love me now as erst, with passion that makes pale
All ardor else : nor aught in nature can avail
To separate us two, save what, in stopping breath,
May peradventure stop devotion likewise — death !

PROLOGUE.

Amphibian.

The fancy I had to-day,
 Fancy which turned a fear!
I swam far out in the bay,
 Since waves laughed warm and clear.

I lay and looked at the sun,
 The noon-sun looked at me:
Between us two, no one
 Live creature, that I could see.

Yes! There came floating by
 Me, who lay floating too,
Such a strange butterfly!
 Creature as dear as new:

Because the membraned wings
 So wonderful, so wide,
So sun-suffused, were things
 Like soul and nought beside.

A handbreadth overhead!
 All of the sea my own,
It owned the sky instead;
 Both of us were alone.

I never shall join its flight,
 For, nought buoys flesh in air.
If it touch the sea — good night!
 Death sure and swift waits there.

Can the insect feel the better
 For watching the uncouth play
Of limbs that slip the fetter,
 Pretend as they were not clay?

Undoubtedly I rejoice
 That the air comports so well
With a creature which had the choice
 Of the land once. Who can tell?

What if a certain soul
 Which early slipped its sheath,

And has for its home the whole
  Of heaven, thus look beneath,

Thus watch one who, in the world,
  Both lives and likes life's way,
Nor wishes the wings unfurled
  That sleep in the worm, they say?

But sometimes when the weather
  Is blue, and warm waves tempt
To free oneself of tether,
  And try a life exempt

From worldly noise and dust,
  In the sphere which overbrims
With passion and thought, — why, just
  Unable to fly, one swims!

By passion and thought upborne,
  One smiles to one's self — "They fare
Scarce better, they need not scorn
  Our sea, who live in the air!"

Emancipate through passion
  And thought, with sea for sky,
We substitute, in a fashion,
  For heaven — poetry:

Which sea, to all intent,
  Gives flesh such noon-disport
As a finer element
  Affords the spirit-sort.

Whatever they are, we seem:
  Imagine the thing they know;
All deeds they do, we dream;
  Can heaven be else but so?

And meantime, yonder streak
  Meets the horizon's verge;
That is the land, to seek
  If we tire or dread the surge:

Land the solid and safe —
  To welcome again (confess!)
When, high and dry, we chafe
  The body, and don the dress.

Does she look, pity, wonder
At one who mimics flight,
Swims — heaven above, sea under,
Yet always earth in sight?

FIFINE AT THE FAIR.

I.

O TRIP and skip, Elvire! Link arm in arm with me!
Like husband and like wife, together let us see
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage,
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage.

II.

Now, who supposed the night would play us such a prank?
— That what was raw and brown, rough pole and shaven plank,
Mere bit of hoarding, half by trestle propped, half tub,
Would flaunt it forth as brisk as butterfly from grub?
This comes of sun and air, of Autumn afternoon,
And Pornic and Saint Gille, whose feast affords the boon —
This scaffold turned parterre, this flower-bed in full blow,
Bateleurs, baladines! We shall not miss the show!
They pace and promenade; they presently will dance:
What good were else i' the drum and fife? O pleasant land of
France!

III.

Who saw them make their entry? At wink of eve, be sure!
They love to steal a march, nor lightly risk the lure.
They keep their treasure hid, nor stale (improvident)
Before the time is ripe, each wonder of their tent —
Yon six-legged sheep, to wit, and he who beats a gong,
Lifts cap and waves salute, exhilarates the throng —
Their ape of many years and much adventure, grim
And gray with pitying fools who find a joke in him.
Or, best, the human beauty, Mimi, Toinette, Fifine,
Tricot fines down if fat, padding plumps up if lean,
Ere, shedding petticoat, modesty, and such toys,
They bounce forth, squalid girls transformed to gamesome boys.

IV.

No, no, thrice, Pornic, no! Perpend the authentic tale!
'T was not for every Gawain to gaze upon the Grail!
But whoso went his rounds, when flew bat, flitted midge,

Might hear across the dusk, — where both roads join the bridge,
Hard by the little port, — creak a slow caravan,
A chimneyed house on wheels; so shyly-sheathed, began
To broaden out the bud which, bursting unaware,
Now takes away our breath, queen-tulip of the Fair!

V.

Yet morning promised much: for, pitched and slung and reared
On terrace 'neath the tower, 'twixt tree and tree appeared
An airy structure; how the pennon from its dome,
Frenetic to be free, makes one red stretch for home!
The home far and away, the distance where lives joy,
The cure, at once and ever, of world and world's annoy;
Since, what lolls full in front, a furlong from the booth,
But ocean-idleness, sky-blue and millpond-smooth?

VI.

Frenetic to be free! And, do you know, there beats
Something within my breast, as sensitive? — repeats
The fever of the flag? My heart makes just the same
Passionate stretch, fires up for lawlessness, lays claim
To share the life they lead: losels, who have and use
The hour what way they will, — applaud them or abuse
Society, whereof myself am at the beck,
Whose call obey, and stoop to burden stiffest neck!

VII.

Why is it that whene'er a faithful few combine
To cast allegiance off, play truant, nor repine,
Agree to bear the worst, forego the best in store
For us who, left behind, do duty as of yore, —
Why is it that, disgraced, they seem to relish life the more?
— Seem as they said, "We know a secret passing praise
Or blame of such as you! Remain! we go our ways
With something you o'erlooked, forgot or chose to sweep
Clean out of door: our pearl picked from your rubbish-heap.
You care not for your loss, we calculate our gain.
All 's right. Are you content? Why, so let things remain!
To the wood then, to the wild: free life, full liberty!"
And when they rendezvous beneath the inclement sky,
House by the hedge, reduced to brute-companionship,
— Misguided ones who gave society the slip,
And find too late how boon a parent they despised,
What ministration spurned, how sweet and civilized —
Then, left alone at last with self-sought wretchedness,

No interloper else! — why is it, can we guess? —
At somebody's expense, goes up so frank a laugh?
As though they held the corn, and left us only chaff
From garners crammed and closed. And we indeed are clever
If we get grain as good, by threshing straw forever!

VIII.

Still, truants as they are and purpose yet to be,
That nowise needs forbid they venture — as you see —
To cross confine, approach the once familiar roof
O' the kindly race their flight estranged: stand half aloof,
Sidle half up, press near, and proffer wares for sale
— In their phrase, — make, in ours, white levy of black mail.
They, of the wild, require some touch of us the tame,
Since clothing, meat and drink, mean money all the same.

IX.

If hunger, proverbs say, allures the wolf from wood,
Much more the bird must dare a dash at something good:
Must snatch up, bear away in beak, the trifle-treasure
To wood and wild, and then — O how enjoy at leisure!
Was never tree-built nest, you climbed and took, of bird,
(Rare city-visitant, talked of, scarce seen or heard,)
But, when you would dissect the structure, piece by piece,
You found, enwreathed amid the country-product — fleece
And feather, thistle-fluffs and bearded windlestraws —
Some shred of foreign silk, unravelling of gauze,
Bit, maybe, of brocade, mid fur and blow-bell-down:
Filched plainly from mankind, dear tribute paid by town,
Which proved how oft the bird had plucked up heart of grace,
Swooped down at waif and stray, made furtively our place
Pay tax and toll, then borne the booty to enrich
Her paradise i' the waste; the how and why of which,
That is the secret, there the mystery that stings!

X.

For, what they traffic in, consists of just the things
We, — proud ones who so scorn dwellers without the pale,
Bateleurs, baladines, white leviers of black mail, —
I say, they sell what we most pique us that we keep!
How comes it, all we hold so dear they count so cheap?

XI.

What price should you impose, for instance, on repute,
Good fame, your own good fame and family's to boot?
Stay start of quick moustache, arrest the angry rise

Of eyebrow! All I asked is answered by surprise.
Now tell me: are you worth the cost of a cigar?
Go boldly, enter booth, disburse the coin at bar
Of doorway where presides the master of the troop,
And forthwith you survey his Graces in a group,
Live Picture, picturesque no doubt and close to life:
His sisters, right and left; the Grace in front, his wife.
Next, who is this performs the feat of the Trapeze?
Lo, she is launched, look — fie, the fairy! — how she flees
O'er all those heads thrust back, — mouths, eyes, one gape and stare, —
No scrap of skirt impedes free passage through the air,
Till, plumb on the other side, she lights and laughs again,
That fairy-form, whereof each muscle, nay, each vein
The curious may inspect, — his daughter that he sells
Each rustic for five sous. Desiderate aught else
O' the vendor? As you leave his show, why, joke the man!
"You cheat: your six-legged sheep, I recollect, began
Both life and trade, last year, trimmed properly and clipt,
As the Twin-headed Babe, and Human Nondescript!"
What does he care? You paid his price, may pass your jest.
So values he repute, good fame, and all the rest!

XII.

But try another tack; say: "I indulge caprice,
Who am Don and Duke, and Knight, beside, o' the Golden Fleece,
And, never mind how rich. Abandon this career!
Have hearth and home, nor let your womankind appear
Without as multiplied a coating as protects
An onion from the eye! Become, in all respects,
God-fearing householder, subsistent by brain-skill,
Hand-labor; win your bread whatever way you will,
So it be honestly, — and, while I have a purse,
Means shall not lack!" — his thanks will be the roundest curse
That ever rolled from lip.

XIII.

Now, what is it? — returns
The question — heartens so this losel that he spurns
All we so prize? I want, put down in black and white,
What compensating joy, unknown and infinite,
Turns lawlessness to law, makes destitution — wealth,
Vice — virtue, and disease of soul and body — health?

XIV.

Ah, the slow shake of head, the melancholy smile,
The sigh almost a sob! What 's wrong, was right erewhile?
Why are we two at once such ocean-width apart?
Pale fingers press my arm, and sad eyes probe my heart.
Why is the wife in trouble?

XV.

This way, this way, Fifine!
Here 's she, shall make my thoughts be surer what they mean!
First let me read the signs, portray you past mistake
The gypsy's foreign self, no swarth our sun could bake.
Yet where 's a woolly trace degrades the wiry hair?
And note the Greek-nymph nose, and — oh, my Hebrew pair
Of eye and eye — o'erarched by velvet of the mole —
That swim as in a sea, that dip and rise and roll,
Spilling the light around! While either ear is cut
Thin as a dusk-leaved rose carved from a cocoa-nut.
And then, her neck! now, grant you had the power to deck,
Just as your fancy pleased, the bistre-length of neck,
Could lay, to shine against its shade, a moonlike row
Of pearls, each round and white as bubble Cupids blow
Big out of mother's milk, — what pearl-moon would surpass
That string of mock-turquoise, those almandines of glass,
Where girlhood terminates? for with breasts'-birth commence
The boy, and page-costume, till pink and impudence
End admirably all: complete the creature trips
Our way now, brings sunshine upon her spangled hips,
As here she fronts us full, with pose half-frank, half-fierce!

XVI.

Words urged in vain, Elvire! You waste your quarte and tierce,
Lunge at a phantom here, try fence in fairy-land.
For me, I own defeat, ask but to understand
The acknowledged victory of whom I call my queen,
Sexless and bloodless sprite: though mischievous and mean,
Yet free and flower-like too, with loveliness for law,
And self-sustainment made morality.

XVII.

A flaw
Do you account i' the lily, of lands which travellers know,
That, just as golden gloom supersedes Northern snow
I' the chalice, so, about each pistil, spice is packed, —

Deliriously-drugged scent, in lieu of odor lacked,
With us, by bee and moth, their banquet to enhance
At morn and eve, when dew, the chilly sustenance,
Needs mixture of some chaste and temperate perfume?
I ask, is she in fault who guards such golden gloom,
Such dear and damning scent, by who cares what devices,
And takes the idle life of insects she entices
When, drowned to heart's desire, they satiate the inside
O' the lily, mark her wealth and manifest her pride?

XVIII.

But, wiser, we keep off, nor tempt the acrid juice;
Discreet we peer and praise, put rich things to right use.
No flavorous venomed bell, — the rose it is, I wot,
Only the rose, we pluck and place, unwronged a jot,
No worse for homage done by every devotee,
I' the proper loyal throne, on breast where rose should be.
Or if the simpler sweets we have to choose among,
Would taste between our teeth, and give its toy the tongue, —
O gorgeous poison-plague, on thee no hearts are set!
We gather daisy meek, or maiden violet:
I think it is Elvire we love, and not Fifine.

XIX.

"How does she make my thoughts be sure of what they mean?"
Judge and be just! Suppose, an age and time long past
Renew for our behoof one pageant more, the last
O' the kind, sick Louis liked to see defile between
Him and the yawning grave, its passage served to screen.
With eye as gray as lead, with cheek as brown as bronze,
Here where we stand, shall sit and suffer Louis Onze:
The while from yonder tent parade forth, not — oh, no —
Bateleurs, baladines! but range themselves a-row
Those well-sung women-worthies whereof loud fame still finds
Some echo linger faint, less in our hearts than minds.

XX.

See, Helen! pushed in front o' the world's worst night and storm,
By Lady Venus' hand on shoulder: the sweet form
Shrinkingly prominent, though mighty, like a moon
Outbreaking from a cloud, to put harsh things in tune,
And magically bring mankind to acquiesce
In its own ravage, — call no curse upon, but bless
(Beldame, a moment since) the outbreaking beauty, now,

That casts o'er all the blood a candor from her brow.
See, Cleopatra! bared, the entire and sinuous wealth
O' the shining shape; each orb of indolent ripe health,
Captured, just where it finds a fellow-orb as fine
I' the body: traced about by jewels which outline,
Fire-frame, and keep distinct, perfections — lest they melt
To soft smooth unity ere half their hold be felt:
Yet, o'er that white and wonder, a soul's predominance
I' the head so high and haught — except one thievish glance,
From back of oblong eye, intent to count the slain.
Hush, — O I know, Elvire! Be patient, more remain!
What say you to Saint? . . . Pish! Whatever Saint you please,
Cold-pinnacled aloft o' the spire, prays calm the seas
From Pornic Church, and oft at midnight (peasants say)
Goes walking out to save from shipwreck: well she may!
For think how many a year has she been conversant
With nought but winds and rains, sharp courtesy and scant
O' the wintry snow that coats the pent-house of her shrine,
Covers each knee, climbs near, but spares the smile benign
Which seems to say, "I looked for scarce so much from earth!"
She follows, one long thin pure finger in the girth
O' the girdle — whence the folds of garment, eye and eye,
Besprent with fleurs-de-lys, flow down and multiply
Around her feet, — and one, pressed hushingly to lip:
As if, while thus we made her march, some foundering ship
Might miss her from her post, nearer to God halfway
In heaven, and she inquired, "Who that treads earth can pray?
I doubt if even she, the unashamed! though, sure,
She must have stripped herself only to clothe the poor."

XXI.

This time, enough 's a feast, not one more form, Elvire!
Provided you allow that, bringing up the rear
O' the bevy I am loth to — by one bird — curtail,
First note may lead to last, an octave crown the scale,
And this feminity be followed — do not flout! —
By — who concludes the masque with curtsey, smile and pout,
Submissive-mutinous? No other than Fifine
Points toe, imposes haunch, and pleads with tambourine!

XXII.

"Well, what 's the meaning here, what does the masque intend,
Which, unabridged, we saw file past us, with no end
Of fair ones, till Fifine came, closed the catalogue?"

XXIII.

Task fancy yet again! Suppose you cast this clog
Of flesh away (that weeps, upbraids, withstands my arm)
And pass to join your peers, paragon charm with charm,
As I shall show you may, — prove best of beauty there!
Yourself confront yourself! This, help me to declare
That yonder-you, who stand beside these, braving each
And blinking none, beat her who lured to Troy-town beach
The purple prows of Greece, — nay, beat Fifine; whose face,
Mark how I will inflame, when seigneur-like I place
I' the tambourine, to spot the strained and piteous blank
Of pleading parchment, see, no less than a whole franc!

XXIV.

Ah, do you mark the brown o' the cloud, made bright with fire
Through and through? as, old wiles succeeding to desire,
Quality (you and I) once more compassionate
A hapless infant, doomed (fie on such partial fate!)
To sink the inborn shame, waive privilege of sex,
And posture as you see, support the nods and becks
Of clowns that have their stare, nor always pay its price;
An infant born perchance as sensitive and nice
As any soul of you, proud dames, whom destiny
Keeps uncontaminate from stigma of the sty
She wallows in! You draw back skirts from filth like her
Who, possibly, braves scorn, if, scorned, she minister
To age, want, and disease of parents one or both;
Nay, peradventure, stoops to degradation, loth
That some just-budding sister, the dew yet on the rose,
Should have to share in turn the ignoble trade, — who knows?

XXV.

Ay, who indeed! Myself know nothing, but dare guess
That off she trips in haste to hand the booty . . . yes,
'Twixt fold and fold of tent, there looms he, dim-discerned,
The ogre, lord of all those lavish limbs have earned!
— Brute-beast-face, — ravage, scar, scowl and malignancy, —
O' the Strong Man, whom (no doubt, her husband) by and by
You shall behold do feats: lift up nor quail beneath
A quintal in each hand, a cart-wheel 'twixt his teeth.
Oh, she prefers sheer strength to ineffective grace,
Breeding and culture! seeks the essential in the case!
To him has flown my franc; and welcome, if that squint
O' the diabolic eye so soften through absinthe,

That, for once, tambourine, tunic and tricot 'scape
Their customary curse "Not half the gain o' the ape!"
Ay, they go in together!

XXVI.

Yet still her phantom stays
Opposite, where you stand: as steady 'neath our gaze, —
The live Elvire's and mine, — though fancy-stuff and mere
Illusion; to be judged — dream-figures — without fear
Or favor, those the false, by you and me the true.

XXVII.

"What puts it in my head to make yourself judge you?"
Well, it may be, the name of Helen brought to mind
A certain myth I mused in years long left behind:
How she that fled from Greece with Paris whom she loved,
And came to Troy, and there found shelter, and so proved
Such cause of the world's woe, — how she, old stories call
This creature, Helen's self, never saw Troy at all.
Jove had his fancy-fit, must needs take empty air,
Fashion her likeness forth, and set the phantom there
I' the midst for sport, to try conclusions with the blind
And blundering race, the game create for Gods, mankind:
Experiment on these, — establish who would yearn
To give up life for her, who, other-minded, spurn
The best her eyes could smile, — make half the world sublime,
And half absurd, for just a phantom all the time!
Meanwhile true Helen's self sat, safe and far away,
By a great river-side, beneath a purer day,
With solitude around, tranquillity within;
Was able to lean forth, look, listen, through the din
And stir; could estimate the worthlessness or worth
Of Helen who inspired such passion to the earth,
A phantom all the time! That put it in my head
To make yourself judge you — the phantom-wife instead
O' the tearful true Elvire!

XXVIII.

I thank the smile at last
Which thins away the tear! Our sky was overcast,
And something fell; but day clears up: if there chanced rain,
The landscape glistens more. I have not vexed in vain
Elvire: because she knows, now she has stood the test,
How, this and this being good, herself may still be best
O' the beauty in review; because the flesh that claimed
Unduly my regard, she thought, the taste, she blamed

In me, for things externe, was all mistake, she finds, —
Or will find, when I prove that bodies show me minds,
That, through the outward sign, the inward grace allures,
And sparks from heaven transpierce earth's coarsest covertures,
All by demonstrating the value of Fifine!

XXIX.

Partake my confidence! No creature 's made so mean
But that, some way, it boasts, could we investigate,
Its supreme worth: fulfils, by ordinance of fate,
Its momentary task, gets glory all its own,
Tastes triumph in the world, pre-eminent, alone.
Where is the single grain of sand, 'mid millions heaped
Confusedly on the beach, but, did we know, has leaped
Or will leap, would we wait, i' the century, some once,
To the very throne of things? — earth's brightest for the nonce,
When sunshine shall impinge on just that grain's facette
Which fronts him fullest, first, returns his ray with jet
Of promptest praise, thanks God best in creation's name!
As firm is my belief, quick sense perceives the same
Self-vindicating flash illustrate every man
And woman of our mass, and prove, throughout the plan,
No detail but, in place allotted it, was prime
And perfect.

XXX.

Witness her, kept waiting all this time!
What happy angle makes Fifine reverberate
Sunshine, least sand-grain, she, of shadiest social state?
No adamantine shield, polished like Helen there,
Fit to absorb the sun, regorge him till the glare,
Dazing the universe, draw Troy-ward those blind beaks
Of equal-sided ships rowed by the well-greaved Greeks!
No Asian mirror, like yon Ptolemaic witch
Able to fix sun fast and tame sun down, enrich,
Not burn the world with beams thus flatteringly rolled
About her, head to foot, turned slavish snakes of gold!
And oh, no tinted pane of oriel sanctity,
Does our Fifine afford, such as permits supply
Of lustrous heaven, revealed, far more than mundane sight
Could master, to thy cell, pure Saint! where, else too bright,
So suits thy sense the orb, that, what outside was noon,
Pales, through thy lozenged blue, to meek benefic moon!
What then? does that prevent each dunghill, we may pass
Daily, from boasting too its bit of looking-glass,
Its sherd which, sun-smit, shines, shoots arrowy fire beyond
That satin-muffled mope, your sulky diamond?

XXXI.

And now, the mingled ray she shoots, I decompose.
Her antecedents, take for execrable! Gloze
No whit on your premiss: let be, there was no worst
Of degradation spared Fifine: ordained from first
To last, in body and soul, for one life-long debauch,
The Pariah of the North, the European Nautch!
This, far from seek to hide, she puts in evidence
Calmly, displays the brand, bids pry without offence
Your finger on the place. You comment, "Fancy us
So operated on, maltreated, mangled thus!
Such torture in our case, had we survived an hour?
Some other sort of flesh and blood must be, with power
Appropriate to the vile, unsensitive, tough-thonged,
In lieu of our fine nerve! Be sure, she was not wronged
Too much: you must not think she winced at prick as we!"
Come, come, that's what you say, or would, were thoughts but free.

XXXII.

Well then, thus much confessed, what wonder if there steal
Unchallenged to my heart the force of one appeal
She makes, and justice stamp the sole claim she asserts?
So absolutely good is truth, truth never hurts
The teller, whose worst crime gets somehow grace, avowed.
To me, that silent pose and prayer proclaimed aloud:
"Know all of me outside, the rest be emptiness
For such as you! I call attention to my dress,
Coiffure, outlandish features, lithe memorable limbs,
Piquant entreaty, all that eye-glance overskims.
Does this give pleasure? Then, repay the pleasure, put
Its price i' the tambourine! Do you seek further? Tut!
I'm just my instrument,—sound hollow: mere smooth skin
Stretched o'er gilt framework, I: rub-dub, nought else within—
Always, for such as you!—if I have use elsewhere,—
If certain bells, now mute, can jingle, need you care?
Be it enough, there's truth i' the pleading, which comports
With no word spoken out in cottages or courts,
Since all I plead is, 'Pay for just the sight you see,
And give no credit to another charm in me!'
Do I say, like your Love? 'To praise my face is well,
But, who would know my worth, must search my heart to tell!
Do I say, like your Wife? 'Had I passed in review
The produce of the globe, my man of men were—you!'
Do I say, like your Helen? 'Yield yourself up, obey

Implicitly, nor pause to question, to survey
Even the worshipful! prostrate you at my shrine!
Shall you dare controvert what the world counts divine?
Array your private taste, own liking of the sense,
Own longing of the soul, against the impudence
Of history, the blare and bullying of verse?
As if man ever yet saw reason to disburse
The amount of what sense liked, soul longed for, — given, devised
As love, forsooth, — until the price was recognized
As moderate enough by divers fellow-men!
Then, with his warrant safe that these would love too, then,
Sure that particular gain implies a public loss,
And that no smile he buys but proves a slash across
The face, a stab into the side of somebody —
Sure that, along with love's main-purchase, he will buy
Up the whole stock of earth's uncharitableness,
Envy and hatred, — then, decides he to profess
His estimate of one, by love discerned, though dim
To all the world beside: since what's the world to him?'
Do I say, like your Queen of Egypt? 'Who foregoes
My cup of witchcraft — fault be on the fool! He knows
Nothing of how I pack my wine-press, turn its winch
Three-times-three, all the time to song and dance, nor flinch
From charming on and on, till at the last I squeeze
Out the exhaustive drop that leaves behind mere lees
And dregs, vapidity, thought essence heretofore!
Sup of my sorcery, old pleasures please no more!
Be great, be good, love, learn, have potency of hand
Or heart or head, — what boots? You die, nor understand
What bliss might be in life: you ate the grapes, but knew
Never the taste of wine, such vintage as I brew!'
Do I say, like your Saint? 'An exquisitest touch
Bides in the birth of things: no after-time can much
Enhance that fine, that faint, fugitive first of all!
What color paints the cup o' the May-rose, like the small
Suspicion of a blush which doubtfully begins?
What sound out-warbles brook, while, at the source, it wins
That moss and stone dispart, allow its bubblings breathe?
What taste excels the fruit, just where sharp flavors sheathe
Their sting, and let encroach the honey that allays?
And so with soul and sense; when sanctity betrays
First fear lest earth below seem real as heaven above,
And holy worship, late, change soon to sinful love —
Where is the plenitude of passion which endures
Comparison with that, I ask of amateurs?'
Do I say, like Elvire" . . .

XXXIII.

(Your husband holds you fast,
Will have you listen, learn your character at last!)
"Do I say? — like her mixed unrest and discontent,
Reproachfulness and scorn, with that submission blent
So strangely, in the face, by sad smiles and gay tears, —
Quiescence which attacks, rebellion which endears, —
Say? 'As you loved me once, could you but love me now!
Years probably have graved their passage on my brow,
Lips turn more rarely red, eyes sparkle less than erst;
Such tribute body pays to time; but, unamerced,
The soul retains, nay, boasts old treasure multiplied.
Though dew-prime flee, — mature at noonday, love defied
Chance, the wind, change, the rain: love, strenuous all the more
For storm, struck deeper root and choicer fruitage bore,
Despite the rocking world; yet truth struck root in vain:
While tenderness bears fruit, you praise, not taste again.
Why? They are yours, which once were hardly yours, might go
To grace another's ground: and then — the hopes we know,
The fears we keep in mind! — when, ours to arbitrate,
Your part was to bow neck, bid fall decree of fate.
Then, O the knotty point — white-night's work to revolve —
What meant that smile, that sigh? Not Solon's self could solve!
Then, O the deep surmise what one word might express,
And if what seemed her "No" may not have meant her "Yes!"
Then, such annoy, for cause — calm welcome, such acquist
Of rapture if, refused her arm, hand touched her wrist!
Now, what 's a smile to you? Poor candle that lights up
The decent household gloom which sends you out to sup.
A tear? worse! warns that health requires you keep aloof
From nuptial chamber, since rain penetrates the roof!
Soul, body got and gained, inalienably safe
Your own, become despised; more worth has any waif
Or stray from neighbor's pale: pouch that, — 't is pleasure, pride,
Novelty, property, and larceny beside!
Preposterous thought! to find no value fixed in things,
To covet all you see, hear, dream of, till fate brings
About that, what you want, you gain; then follows change.
Give you the sun to keep, forthwith must fancy range:
A goodly lamp, no doubt, — yet might you catch her hair
And capture, as she frisks, the fen-fire dancing there!
What do I say? at least a meteor 's half in heaven;
Provided filth but shine, my husband hankers even

After putridity that 's phosphorescent, cribs
The rustic's tallow-rush, makes spoil of urchins' squibs,
In short, prefers to me — chaste, temperate, serene —
What sputters green and blue, this fizgig called Fifine!'"

XXXIV

So all your sex mistake! Strange that so plain a fact
Should raise such dire debate! Few families were racked
By torture self-supplied, did Nature grant but this —
That women comprehend mental analysis!

XXXV.

Elvire, do you recall when, years ago, our home
The intimation reached, a certain pride of Rome,
Authenticated piece, in the third, last and best
Manner, — whatever fools and connoisseurs contest, —
No particle disturbed by rude restorer's touch,
The palaced picture-pearl, so long eluding clutch
Of creditor, at last, the Rafael might — could we
But come to terms — change lord, pass from the Prince to me?
I think you recollect my fever of a year:
How the Prince would, and how he would not; now, — too dear
That promise was, he made his grandsire so long since,
Rather to boast "I own a Rafael" than "am Prince!"
And now, the fancy soothed — if really sell he must
His birthright for a mess of pottage — such a thrust
I' the vitals of the Prince were mollified by balm,
Could he prevail upon his stomach to bear qualm,
And bequeath Liberty (because a purchaser
Was ready with the sum — a trifle!) yes, transfer
His heart at all events to that land where, at least,
Free institutions reign! And so, its price increased
Fivefold (Americans are such importunates!),
Soon must his Rafael start for the United States.
O alternating bursts of hope now, then despair!
At last, the bargain 's struck, I 'm all but beggared, there
The Rafael faces me, in fine, no dream at all,
My housemate, evermore to glorify my wall.
A week must pass, before heart-palpitations sink,
In gloating o'er my gain, so late I edged the brink
Of doom; a fortnight more, I spend in Paradise:
"Was outline e'er so true, could coloring entice
So calm, did harmony and quiet so avail?
How right, how resolute, the action tells the tale!"
A month, I bid my friends congratulate their best:
"You happy Don!" (to me): "The blockhead!" (to the rest):

"No doubt he thinks his daub original, poor dupe!"
Then I resume my life: one chamber must not coop
Man's life in, though it boast a marvel like my prize.
Next year, I saunter past with unaverted eyes,
Nay, loll and turn my back: perchance to overlook
With relish, leaf by leaf, Doré's last picture-book.

XXXVI.

Imagine that a voice reproached me from its frame:
"Here do I hang, and may! Your Rafael, just the same,
'T is only you that change: no ecstasies of yore!
No purposed suicide distracts you any more!"
Prompt would my answer meet such frivolous attack:
"You misappropriate sensations. What men lack,
And labor to obtain, is hoped and feared about
After a fashion; what they once obtain, makes doubt,
Expectancy's old fret and fume, henceforward void.
But do they think to hold such havings unalloyed
By novel hopes and fears, of fashion just as new,
To correspond i' the scale? Nowise, I promise you!
Mine you are, therefore mine will be, as fit to cheer
My soul and glad my sense to-day as this-day-year.
So, any sketch or scrap, pochade, caricature,
Made in a moment, meant a moment to endure,
I snap at, seize, enjoy, then tire of, throw aside,
Find you in your old place. But if a servant cried
'Fire in the gallery!'—methinks, were I engaged
In Doré, elbow-deep, picture-books million-paged
To the four winds would pack, sped by the heartiest curse
Was ever launched from lip, to strew the universe.
Would not I brave the best o' the burning, bear away
Either my perfect piece in safety, or else stay
And share its fate, be made its martyr, nor repine?
Inextricably wed, such ashes mixed with mine!"

XXXVII.

For which I get the eye, the hand, the heart, the whole
O' the wondrous wife again!

XXXVIII.

But no, play out your rôle
I' the pageant! 'T is not fit your phantom leave the stage:
I want you, there, to make you, here, confess you wage
Successful warfare, pique those proud ones, and advance
Claim to . . . equality? nay, but predominance
In physique o'er them all, where Helen heads the scene

Closed by its tiniest of tail-tips, pert Fifine.
How ravishingly pure you stand in pale constraint!
My new-created shape, without or touch or taint,
Inviolate of life and worldliness and sin —
Fettered, I hold my flower, her own cup's weight would win
From off the tall slight stalk a-top of which she turns
And trembles, makes appeal to one who roughly earns
Her thanks instead of blame, (did lily only know,)
By thus constraining length of lily, letting snow
Of cup-crown, that 's her face, look from its guardian stake,
Superb on all that crawls beneath, and mutely make
Defiance, with the mouth's white movement of disdain,
To all that stoops, retires, and hovers round again!
How windingly the limbs delay to lead up, reach
Where, crowned, the head waits calm: as if reluctant, each,
That eye should traverse quick such lengths of loveliness,
From feet, which just are found embedded in the dress
Deep swathed about with folds and flowings virginal,
Up to the pleated breasts, rebellious 'neath their pall,
As if the vesture's snow were moulding sleep not death,
Must melt and so release; whereat, from the fine sheath,
The flower-cup-crown starts free, the face is unconcealed,
And what shall now divert me, once the sweet face revealed,
From all I loved so long, so lingeringly left?

XXXIX.

Because indeed your face fits into just the cleft
O' the heart of me, Elvire, makes right and whole once more
All that was half itself without you! As before,
My truant finds its place! Doubtlessly sea-shells yearn,
If plundered by sad chance: would pray their pearls return,
Let negligently slip away into the wave!
Never may eyes desist, those eyes so gray and grave,
From their slow sure supply of the effluent soul within!
And, would you humor me? I dare to ask, unpin
The web of that brown hair! O'erwash o' the sudden, but
As promptly, too, disclose, on either side, the jut
Of alabaster brow! So part rich rillets dyed
Deep by the woodland leaf, when down they pour, each side
O' the rock-top, pushed by Spring!

XL.

"And where i' the world is all
This wonder, you detail so trippingly, espied?
My mirror would reflect a tall, thin, pale, deep-eyed
Personage, pretty once, it may be, doubtless still

Loving, — a certain grace yet lingers, if you will, —
But all this wonder, where?"

XLI.

Why, where but in the sense
And soul of me, Art's judge? Art is my evidence
That something was, is, might be; but no more thing itself,
Than flame is fuel. Once the verse-book laid on shelf,
The picture turned to wall, the music fled from ear, —
Each beauty, born of each, grows clearer and more clear,
Mine henceforth, ever mine!

XLII.

But if I would retrace
Effect, in Art, to cause, — corroborate, erase
What 's right or wrong i' the lines, test fancy in my brain
By fact which gave it birth? I re-peruse in vain
The verse, I fail to find that vision of delight
I' the Bazzi's lost-profile, eye-edge so exquisite.
And, music: what? that burst of pillared cloud by day
And pillared fire by night, was product, must we say,
Of modulating just, by enharmonic change, —
The augmented sixth resolved, — from out the straighter range
Of D sharp minor — leap of disimprisoned thrall —
Into thy light and life, D major natural?

XLIII.

Elvire, will you partake in what I shall impart?
I seem to understand the way heart chooses heart
By help of the outside form, — a reason for our wild
Diversity in choice, — why each grows reconciled
To what is absent, what superfluous in the mask
Of flesh that 's meant to yield, — did nature ply her task
As artist should, — precise the features of the soul,
Which, if in any case they found expression, whole
I' the traits, would give a type, undoubtedly display
A novel, true, distinct perfection in its way.
Never shall I believe any two souls were made
Similar; granting, then, each soul of every grade
Was meant to be itself, prove in itself complete,
And, in completion, good, — nay, best o' the kind, — as meet
Needs must it be that show on the outside correspond
With inward substance, — flesh, the dress which soul has donned,
Exactly reproduce, — were only justice done
Inside and outside too, — types perfect every one.

How happens it that here we meet a mystery
Insoluble to man, a plaguy puzzle? Why
Each soul is either made imperfect, and deserves
As rude a face to match; or else a bungler swerves,
And nature, on a soul worth rendering aright,
Works ill, or proves perverse, or, in her own despite,
— Here too much, there too little, — bids each face, more or less,
Retire from beauty, make approach to ugliness?
And yet succeeds the same: since, what is wanting to success,
If somehow every face, no matter how deform,
Evidence, to some one of hearts on earth, that, warm
Beneath the veriest ash, there hides a spark of soul
Which, quickened by love's breath, may yet pervade the whole
O' the gray, and, free again, be fire? — of worth the same,
Howe'er produced, for, great or little, flame is flame.
A mystery, whereof solution is to seek.

XLIV.

I find it in the fact that each soul, just as weak
Its own way as its fellow, — departure from design
As flagrant in the flesh, — goes striving to combine
With what shall right the wrong, the under or above
The standard: supplement unloveliness by love.
— Ask Plato else! And this corroborates the sage,
That Art, — which I may style the love of loving, rage
Of knowing, seeing, feeling the absolute truth of things
For truth's sake, whole and sole, not any good, truth brings
The knower, seer, feeler, beside, — instinctive Art
Must fumble for the whole, once fixing on a part
However poor, surpass the fragment, and aspire
To reconstruct thereby the ultimate entire.
Art, working with a will, discards the superflux,
Contributes to defect, toils on till, — *fiat lux*, —
There 's the restored, the prime, the individual type!

XLV.

Look, for example now! This piece of broken pipe
(Some shipman's solace erst) shall act as crayon; and —
What tablet better serves my purpose than the sand?
— Smooth slab whereon I draw, no matter with what skill,
A face, and yet another, and yet another still.
There lie my three prime types of beauty!

XLVI.

Laugh your best!
"Exaggeration and absurdity?" Confessed!

Yet, what may that face mean, no matter for its nose,
A yard long, or its chin, a foot short?

XLVII.

"You suppose,
Horror?" Exactly! What 's the odds if, more or less
By yard or foot, the features do manage to express
Such meaning in the main? Were I of Gérôme's force,
Nor feeble as you see, quick should my crayon course
O'er outline, curb, excite, till, — so completion speeds
With Gérôme well at work, — observe how brow recedes,
Head shudders back on spine, as if one haled the hair,
Would have the full-face front what pin-point eye's sharp stare
Announces; mouth agape to drink the flowing fate,
While chin protrudes to meet the burst o' the wave: elate
Almost, spurred on to brave necessity, expend
All life left, in one flash, as fire does at its end.
Retrenchment and addition effect a masterpiece,
Not change i' the motive: here diminish, there increase —
And who wants Horror, has it.

XLVIII.

Who wants some other show
Of soul, may seek elsewhere — this second of the row?
What does it give for germ, monadic mere intent
Of mind in face, faint first of meanings ever meant?
Why, possibly, a grin, that, strengthened, grows a laugh;
That, softened, leaves a smile; that, tempered, bids you quaff
At such a magic cup as English Reynolds once
Compounded: for the witch pulls out of you response
Like Garrick's to Thalia, however due may be
Your homage claimed by that stiff-stoled Melpomene!

XLIX.

And just this one face more! Pardon the bold pretence!
May there not lurk some hint, struggle toward evidence
In that compressed mouth, those strained nostrils, steadfast eyes
Of utter passion, absolute self-sacrifice,
Which — could I but subdue the wild grotesque, refine
That bulge of brow, make blunt that nose's aquiline,
And let, although compressed, a point of pulp appear
I' the mouth — would give at last the portrait of Elvire?

L.

Well, and if so succeed hand-practice on awry
Preposterous art-mistake, shall soul-proficiency

Despair, — when exercised on nature, which at worst
Always implies success, — however crossed and curst
By failure, — such as art would emulate in vain?
Shall any soul despair of setting free again
Trait after trait, until the type as wholly start
Forth, visible to sense, as that minutest part,
(Whate'er the chance,) which first arresting eye, warned soul
That, under wrong enough and ravage, lay the whole
O' the loveliness it "loved" — I take the accepted phrase?

LI.

So I account for tastes: each chooses, none gainsays
The fancy of his fellow, a paradise for him,
A hell for all beside. You can but crown the brim
O' the cup; if it be full, what matters less or more?
Let each, i' the world, amend his love, as I, o' the shore,
My sketch, and the result as undisputed be!
Their handiwork to them, and my Elvire to me:
— Result more beautiful than beauty's self, when lo,
What was my Rafael turns my Michelagnolo!

LII.

For, we two boast, beside our pearl, a diamond.
I' the palace-gallery, the corridor beyond,
Upheaves itself a marble, a magnitude man-shaped
As snow might be. One hand — the Master's — smoothed and scraped
That mass, he hammered on and hewed at, till he hurled
Life out of death, and left a challenge: for the world,
Death still, — since who shall dare, close to the image, say
If this be purposed Art, or mere mimetic play
Of Nature? — wont to deal with crag or cloud, as stuff
To fashion novel forms, like forms we know, enough
For recognition, but enough unlike the same,
To leave no hope ourselves may profit by her game;
Death therefore to the world. Step back a pace or two!
And then, who dares dispute the gradual birth its due
Of breathing life, or breathless immortality,
Where out she stands, and yet stops short, half bold, half shy,
Hesitates on the threshold of things, since partly blent
With stuff she needs must quit, her native element
I' the mind o' the Master, — what's the creature, dear-divine
Yet earthly-awful too, so manly-feminine,
Pretends this white advance? What startling brain-escape
Of Michelagnolo takes elemental shape?
I think he meant the daughter of the old man o' the sea,

Emerging from her wave, goddess Eidotheé —
She who, in elvish sport, spite with benevolence
Mixed Mab-wise up, must needs instruct the Hero whence
Salvation dawns o'er that mad misery of his isle.
Yes, she imparts to him, by what a pranksome wile
He may surprise her sire, asleep beneath a rock,
When he has told their tale, amid his webfoot flock
Of sea-beasts, "fine fat seals with bitter breath!" laughs she
At whom she likes to save, no less: Eidotheé,
Whom you shall never face evolved, in earth, in air,
In wave; but, manifest i' the soul's domain, why, there
She ravishingly moves to meet you, all through aid
O' the soul! Bid shine what should, dismiss into the shade
What should not be, — and there triumphs the paramount
Emprise o' the Master! But, attempt to make account
Of what the sense, without soul's help perceives? I bought
That work — (despite plain proof, whose hand it was had wrought
I' the rough: I think we trace the tool of triple tooth,
Here, there, and everywhere) — bought dearly that uncouth
Unwieldy bulk, for just ten dollars — "Bulk, would fetch —
Converted into lime — some five pauls!" grinned a wretch,
Who, bound on business, paused to hear the bargaining,
And would have pitied me "but for the fun o' the thing!"

LIII.

Shall such a wretch be — you? Must — while I show Elvire
Shaming all other forms, seen as I see her here
I' the soul, — this other-you perversely look outside,
And ask me, "Where i' the world is charm to be descried
I' the tall thin personage, with paled eye, pensive face,
Any amount of love, and some remains of grace?"
See yourself in my soul!

LIV.

And what a world for each
Must somehow be i' the soul, — accept that mode of speech, —
Whether an aura gird the soul, wherein it seems
To float and move, a belt of all the glints and gleams
It struck from out that world, its weaklier fellows found
So dead and cold; or whether these not so much surround,
As pass into the soul itself, add worth to worth,
As wine enriches blood, and straightway send it forth,
Conquering and to conquer, through all eternity,
That 's battle without end.

LV.

I search but cannot see
What purpose serves the soul that strives, or world it tries
Conclusions with, unless the fruit of victories
Stay, one and all, stored up and guaranteed its own
Forever, by some mode whereby shall be made known
The gain of every life. Death reads the title clear —
What each soul for itself conquered from out things here:
Since, in the seeing soul, all worth lies, I assert, —
And nought i' the world, which, save for soul that sees, inert
Was, is, and would be ever, — stuff for transmuting, — null
And void until man's breath evoke the beautiful —
But, touched aright, prompt yields each particle its tongue
Of elemental flame, — no matter whence flame sprung
From gums and spice, or else from straw and rottenness,
So long as soul has power to make them burn, express
What lights and warms henceforth, leaves only ash behind,
Howe'er the chance: if soul be privileged to find
Food so soon that, by first snatch of eye, suck of breath,
It can absorb pure life: or, rather, meeting death
I' the shape of ugliness, by fortunate recoil
So put on its resource, it find therein a foil
For a new birth of life, the challenged soul's response
To ugliness and death, — creation for the nonce.

LVI.

I gather heart through just such conquests of the soul,
Through evocation out of that which, on the whole,
Was rough, ungainly, partial accomplishment, at best,
And — what, at worst, save failure to spit at and detest? —
— Through transference of all, achieved in visible things,
To where, secured from wrong, rest soul's imaginings —
Through ardor to bring help just where completion halts,
Do justice to the purpose, ignore the slips and faults —
And, last, through waging with deformity a fight
Which wrings thence, at the end, precise its opposite.
I praise the loyalty o' the scholar, — stung by taunt
Of fools, "Does this evince thy Master men so vaunt?
Did he then perpetrate the plain abortion here?" —
Who cries, "His work am I! full fraught by him, I clear
His fame from each result of accident and time,
Myself restore his work to its fresh morning-prime,
Not daring touch the mass of marble, fools deride,
But putting my idea in plaster by its side,
His, since mine; I, he made, vindicate who made me!"

LVII.

For, you must know, I too achieved Eidotheé,
In silence and by night — dared justify the lines
Plain to my soul, although, to sense, that triple-tine's
Achievement halt halfway, break down, or leave a blank.
If she stood forth at last, the Master was to thank!
Yet may there not have smiled approval in his eyes —
That one at least was left who, born to recognize
Perfection in the piece imperfect, worked, that night,
In silence, such his faith, until the apposite
Design was out of him, truth palpable once more?
And then — for at one blow, its fragments strewed the floor —
Recalled the same to live within his soul as heretofore.

LVIII.

And, even as I hold and have Eidotheé,
I say, I cannot think that gain, — which would not be
Except a special soul had gained it, — that such gain
Can ever be estranged, do aught but appertain
Immortally, by right firm, indefeasible,
To who performed the feat, through God's grace and man's will!
Gain, never shared by those who practised with earth's stuff,
And spoiled whate'er they touched, leaving its roughness rough,
Its blankness bare, and, when the ugliness opposed,
Either struck work or laughed "He doted or he dozed!"

LIX.

While, oh, how all the more will love become intense
Hereafter, when "to love" means yearning to dispense,
Each soul, its own amount of gain through its own mode
Of practising with life, upon some soul which owed
Its treasure, all diverse and yet in worth the same,
To new work and changed way! Things furnish you rose-flame,
Which burn up red, green, blue, nay, yellow more than needs,
For me, I nowise doubt; why doubt a time succeeds
When each one may impart, and each receive, both share
The chemic secret, learn, — where I lit force, why there
You drew forth lambent pity, — where I found only food
For self-indulgence, you still blew a spark at brood
I' the grayest ember, stopped not till self-sacrifice imbued
Heaven's face with flame? What joy, when each may supplement
The other, changing each, as changed, till, wholly blent,
Our old things shall be new, and, what we both ignite,
Fuse, lose the varicolor in achromatic white!

Exemplifying law, apparent even now
In the eternal progress, — love's law, which I avow
And thus would formulate: each soul lives, longs and works
For itself, by itself, because a lodestar lurks,
An other than itself, — in whatsoe'er the niche
Of mistiest heaven it hide, whoe'er the Glumdalclich
May grasp the Gulliver: or it, or he, or she —
Theosutos e broteios eper kekramene, —
(For fun's sake, where the phrase has fastened, leave it fixed!
So soft it says, — God, man, or both together mixed!)
This, guessed at through the flesh, by parts which prove the whole,
This constitutes the soul discernible by soul
— Elvire, by me!

LX.

"And then" — (pray you, permit remain
This hand upon my arm! — your cheek dried, if you deign,
Choosing my shoulder) — "then!" — (Stand up for, boldly state
The objection in its length and breadth!) "You abdicate,
With boast yet on your lip, soul's empire, and accept
The rule of sense; the Man, from monarch's throne has stept —
Leapt, rather, at one bound, to base, and there lies, Brute.
You talk of soul, — how soul, in search of soul to suit,
Must needs review the sex, the army, rank and file
Of womankind, report no face nor form so vile
But that a certain worth, by certain signs, may thence
Evolve itself and stand confessed — to soul — by sense.
Sense? Oh, the loyal bee endeavors for the hive!
Disinterested hunts the flower-field through, alive
Not one mean moment, no, — suppose on flower he light, —
To his peculiar drop, petal-dew perquisite,
Matter-of-course snatched snack: unless he taste, how try?
This, light on tongue-tip laid, allows him pack his thigh,
Transport all he counts prize, provision for the comb,
Food for the future day, — a banquet, but at home!
Soul? Ere you reach Fifine's, some flesh may be to pass!
That bombéd brow, that eye, a kindling chrysopras,
Beneath its stiff black lash, inquisitive how speeds
Each functionary limb, how play of foot succeeds,
And how you let escape or duly sympathize
With gastro-knemian grace, — true, your soul tastes and tries,
And trifles time with these, but, fear not, will arrive
At essence in the core, bring honey home to hive,
Brain-stock and heart-stuff both — to strike objectors dumb —
Since only soul affords the soul fit pabulum!

Be frank for charity! Who is it you deceive —
Yourself or me or God, with all this make-believe?"

LXI.

And frank I will respond as you interrogate.
Ah, Music, wouldst thou help! Words struggle with the weight
So feebly of the False, thick element between
Our soul, the True, and Truth! which, but that intervene
False shows of things, were reached as easily by thought
Reducible to word, as now by yearnings wrought
Up with thy fine free force, O Music, that canst thrid,
Electrically win a passage through the lid
Of earthly sepulchre, our words may push against,
Hardly transpierce as thou! Not dissipate, thou deign'st,
So much as tricksily elude what words attempt
To heave away, i' the mass, and let the soul, exempt
From all that vapory obstruction, view, instead
Of glimmer underneath, a glory overhead.
Not feebly, like our phrase, against the barrier go
In suspirative swell the authentic notes I know,
By help whereof, I would our souls were found without
The pale, above the dense and dim which breeds the doubt!
But Music, dumb for you, withdraws her help from me;
And, since to weary words recourse again must be,
At least permit they rest their burden here and there,
Music-like: cover space! My answer, — need you care
If it exceed the bounds, reply to questioning
You never meant should plague? Once fairly on the wing,
Let me flap far and wide!

LXII.

For this is just the time,
The place, the mood in you and me, when all things chime.
Clash forth life's common chord, whence, list how there ascend
Harmonics far and faint, till our perception end, —
Reverberated notes whence we construct the scale
Embracing what we know and feel and are! How fail
To find or, better, lose your question, in this quick
Reply which nature yields, ample and catholic?
For, arm in arm, we two have reached, nay, passed, you see,
The village-precinct; sun sets mild on Sainte-Marie —
We only catch the spire, and yet I seem to know
What's hid i' the turn o' the hill: how all the graves must glow
Soberly, as each warms its little iron cross,
Flourished about with gold, and graced (if private loss
Be fresh) with stiff rope-wreath of yellow crisp bead-blooms

Which tempt down birds to pay their supper, 'mid the tombs,
With prattle good as song, amuse the dead awhile,
If couched they hear beneath the matted camomile!

LXIII.

Bid them good-bye before last friend has sung and supped!
Because we pick our path and need our eyes, — abrupt
Descent enough, — but here 's the beach, and there 's the bay,
And, opposite, the streak of Île Noirmoutier.
Thither the waters tend; they freshen as they haste,
At feel o' the night-wind, though, by cliff and cliff embraced,
This breadth of blue retains its self-possession still;
As you and I intend to do, who take our fill
Of sights and sounds — soft sound, the countless hum and skip
Of insects we disturb, and that good fellowship
Of rabbits our footfall sends huddling, each to hide
He best knows how and where; and what whirred past, wings wide?
That was an owl, their young may justlier apprehend!
Though you refuse to speak, your beating heart, my friend,
I feel against my arm, — though your bent head forbids
A look into your eyes, yet, on my cheek, their lids
That ope and shut, soft send a silken thrill the same.
Well, out of all and each these nothings, comes — what came
Often enough before, the something that would aim
Once more at the old mark: the impulse to at last
Succeed where hitherto was failure in the past,
And yet again essay the adventure. Clearlier sings
No bird to its couched corpse, "Into the truth of things —
Out of their falseness rise, and reach thou, and remain!"

LXIV.

"That rise into the true out of the false — explain?"
May an example serve? In yonder bay I bathed,
This sunny morning: swam my best, then hung, half swathed
With chill, and half with warmth, i' the channel's midmost deep:
You know how one — not treads, but stands in water? Keep
Body and limbs below, hold head back, uplift chin,
And, for the rest, leave care! If brow, eyes, mouth, should win
Their freedom, — excellent! If they must brook the surge,
No matter though they sink, let but the nose emerge.
So, all of me in brine lay soaking: did I care
One jot? I kept alive by man's due breath of air
I' the nostrils, high and dry. At times, o'er these would run
The ripple, even wash the wavelet, — morning's sun

Tempted advance, no doubt: and always flash of froth,
Fish-outbreak, bubbling by, would find me nothing loth
To rise and look around; then all was overswept
With dark and death at once. But trust the old adept!
Back went again the head, a merest motion made,
Fin-fashion, either hand, and nostril soon conveyed
Assurance light and life were still in reach as erst:
Always the last and — wait and watch — sometimes the first.
Try to ascend breast-high? wave arms wide free of tether?
Be in the air and leave the water altogether?
Under went all again, till I resigned myself
To only breathe the air, that 's footed by an elf,
And only swim the water, that 's native to a fish.
But there is no denying that, ere I curbed my wish,
And schooled my restive arms, salt entered mouth and eyes
Often enough — sun, sky, and air so tantalize!
Still, the adept swims, this accorded, that denied;
Can always breathe, sometimes see and be satisfied!

LXV.

I liken to this play o' the body — fruitless strife
To slip the sea and hold the heaven — my spirit's life
'Twixt false, whence it would break, and true, where it would bide.
I move in, yet resist, am upborne every side
By what I beat against, an element too gross
To live in, did not soul duly obtain her dose
Of life-breath, and inhale from truth's pure plenitude
Above her, snatch and gain enough to just illude
With hope that some brave bound may baffle evermore
The obstructing medium, make who swam henceforward soar:
— Gain scarcely snatched when, foiled by the very effort, souse,
Underneath ducks the soul, her truthward yearnings dowse
Deeper in falsehood! ay, but fitted less and less
To bear in nose and mouth old briny bitterness
Proved alien more and more: since each experience proves
Air — the essential good, not sea, wherein who moves
Must thence, in the act, escape, apart from will or wish.
Move a mere hand to take water-weed, jelly-fish,
Upward you tend! And yet our business with the sea
Is not with air, but just o' the water, watery:
We must endure the false, no particle of which
Do we acquaint us with, but up we mount a pitch
Above it, find our head reach truth, while hands explore
The false below: so much while here we bathe, — no more!

LXVI.

Now, there is one prime point (hear and be edified!)
One truth more true for me than any truth beside —
To-wit, that I am I, who have the power to swim,
The skill to understand the law whereby each limb
May bear to keep immersed, since, in return, made sure
That its mere movement lifts head clean through coverture.
By practice with the false, I reach the true? Why, thence
It follows, that the more I gain self-confidence,
Get proof I know the trick, can float, sink, rise, at will,
The better I submit to what I have the skill
To conquer in my turn, even now, and by and by
Leave wholly for the land, and there laugh, shake me dry
To last drop, saturate with noonday — no need more
Of wet and fret, plagued once: on Pornic's placid shore,
Abundant air to breathe, sufficient sun to feel!
Meantime I buoy myself: no whit my senses reel
When over me there breaks a billow; nor, elate
Too much by some brief taste, I quaff intemperate
The air, o'ertop breast-high the wave-environment.
Full well I know the thing I grasp, as if intent
To hold, — my wandering wave, — will not be grasped at all:
The solid-seeming grasped, the handful great or small
Must go to nothing, glide through fingers fast enough;
But none the less, to treat liquidity as stuff —
Though failure — certainly succeeds beyond its aim,
Sends head above, past thing that hands miss, or the same.

LXVII.

So with this wash o' the world, wherein life-long we drift;
We push and paddle through the foam by making shift
To breathe above at whiles when, after deepest duck
Down underneath the show, we put forth hand and pluck
At what seems somehow like reality — a soul.
I catch at this and that, to capture and control,
Presume I hold a prize, discover that my pains
Are run to nought: my hands are balked, my head regains
The surface where I breathe and look about, a space.
The soul that helped me mount? Swallowed up in the race
O' the tide, come who knows whence, gone gayly who knows where!
I thought the prize was mine; I flattered myself there.
It did its duty, though: I felt it, it felt me;
Or, where I look about and breathe, I should not be.
The main point is — the false fluidity was bound

Acknowledge that it frothed o'er substance, nowise found
Fluid, but firm and true. Man, outcast, "howls," — at rods? —
If "sent in playful spray a-shivering to his gods!"
Childishest childe, man makes thereby no bad exchange.
Stay with the flat-fish, thou! We like the upper range
Where the "gods" live, perchance the dæmons also dwell:
Where operates a Power, which every throb and swell
Of human heart invites that human soul approach,
"Sent" near and nearer still, however "spray" encroach
On "shivering" flesh below, to altitudes, which gained,
Evil proves good, wrong right, obscurity explained,
And "howling" childishness. Whose howl have we to thank,
If all the dogs 'gan bark and puppies whine, till sank
Each yelper's tail 'twixt legs? for Huntsman Commonsense
Came to the rescue, bade prompt thwack of thong dispense
Quiet i' the kennel; taught that ocean might be blue,
And rolling and much more, and yet the soul have, too,
Its touch of God's own flame, which He may so expand,
"Who measurèd the waters i' the hollow of His hand,"
That ocean's self shall dry, turn dewdrop in respect
Of all-triumphant fire, matter with intellect
Once fairly matched; bade him who egged on hounds to bay,
Go curse, i' the poultry yard, his kind: "there let him lay"
The swan's one addled egg: which yet shall put to use,
Rub breast-bone warm against, so many a sterile goose!

LXVIII.

No, I want sky not sea, prefer the larks to shrimps,
And never dive so deep but that I get a glimpse
O' the blue above, a breath of the air around. Elvire,
I seize — by catching at the melted beryl here,
The tawny hair that just has trickled off, — Fifine!
Did not we two trip forth to just enjoy the scene,
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage,
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage —
Dabble, and there an end, with foam and froth o'er face,
Till suddenly Fifine suggested change of place?
Now we taste æther, scorn the wave, and interchange apace
No ordinary thoughts, but such as evidence
The cultivated mind in both. On what pretence
Are you and I to sneer at who lent help to hand,
And gave the lucky lift?

LXIX.

Still sour? I understand!
One ugly circumstance discredits my fair plan —

That Woman does the work: I waive the help of Man.
"Why should experiment be tried with only waves,
When solid spars float round? Still some Thalassia saves
Too pertinaciously, as though no Triton, bluff
As e'er blew brine from conch, were free to help enough!
Surely, to recognize a man, his mates serve best!
Why is there not the same or greater interest
In the strong spouse as in the pretty partner, pray,
Were recognition just your object, as you say,
Amid this element o' the false?"

LXX.

We come to terms.
I need to be proved true; and nothing so confirms
One's faith in the prime point that one 's alive, not dead,
In all Descents to Hell whereof I ever read,
As when a phantom there, male enemy or friend,
Or merely stranger-shade, is struck, is forced suspend
His passage: "You that breathe, along with us the ghosts?"
Here, why must it be still a woman that accosts?

LXXI.

Because, one woman 's worth, in that respect, such hairy hosts
Of the other sex and sort! Men? Say you have the power
To make them yours, rule men, throughout life's little hour,
According to the phrase; what follows? Men, you make,
By ruling them, your own: each man for his own sake
Accepts you as his guide, avails him of what worth
He apprehends in you to sublimate his earth
With fire: content, if so you convoy him through night,
That you shall play the sun, and he, the satellite,
Pilfer your light and heat and virtue, starry pelf,
While, caught up by your course, he turns upon himself.
Women rush into you, and there remain absorbed.
Beside, 't is only men completely formed, full-orbed,
Are fit to follow track, keep pace, illustrate so
The leader: any sort of woman may bestow
Her atom on the star, or clod she counts for such, —
Each little making less bigger by just that much.
Women grow you, while men depend on you at best.
And what dependence! Bring and put him to the test,
Your specimen disciple, a handbreadth separate
From you, he almost seemed to touch before! Abate
Complacency you will, I judge, at what 's divulged!
Some flabbiness you fixed, some vacancy out-bulged,
Some — much — nay, all, perhaps, the outward man 's your work:

But, inside man? — find him, wherever he may lurk,
And where 's a touch of you in his true self?

LXXII.

I wish
Some wind would waft this way a glassy bubble-fish
O' the kind the sea inflates, and show you, once detached
From wave . . . or no, the event is better told than watched:
Still may the thing float free, globose and opaline
All over, save where just the amethysts combine
To blue their best, rim-round the sea-flower with a tinge
Earth's violet never knew! Well, 'neath that gem-tipped fringe,
A head lurks — of a kind — that acts as stomach too;
Then comes the emptiness which out the water blew
So big and belly-like, but, dry of water drained,
Withers away nine-tenths. Ah, but a tenth remained!
That was the creature's self: no more akin to sea,
Poor rudimental head and stomach, you agree,
Than sea 's akin to sun who yonder dips his edge.

LXXIII.

But take the rill which ends a race o'er yonder ledge
O' the fissured cliff, to find its fate in smoke below!
Disengage that, and ask — what news of life, you know
It led, that long lone way, through pasture, plain and waste?
All 's gone to give the sea! no touch of earth, no taste
Of air, reserved to tell how rushes used to bring
The butterfly and bee, and fisher-bird that 's king
O' the purple kind, about the snow-soft silver-sweet
Infant of mist and dew; only these atoms fleet,
Embittered evermore, to make the sea one drop
More big thereby — if thought keep count where sense must stop.

LXXIV.

The full-blown ingrate, mere recipient of the brine,
That takes all and gives nought, is Man; the feminine
Rillet that, taking all and giving nought in turn,
Goes headlong to her death i' the sea, without concern
For the old inland life, snow-soft and silver-clear,
That 's woman — typified from Fifine to Elvire.

LXXV.

Then, how diverse the modes prescribed to who would deal
With either kind of creature! 'T is Man, you seek to seal
Your very own? Resolve, for first step, to discard

Nine-tenths of what you are! To make, you must be marred, —
To raise your race, must stoop, — to teach them aught, must learn
Ignorance, meet halfway what most you hope to spurn
I' the sequel. Change yourself, dissimulate the thought
And vulgarize the word, and see the deed be brought
To look like nothing done with any such intent
As teach men — though perchance it teach, by accident!
So may you master men: assured that if you show
One point of mastery, departure from the low
And level, — head or heart-revolt at long disguise,
Immurement, stifling soul in mediocrities, —
If inadvertently a gesture, much more, word
Reveal the hunter no companion for the herd,
His chance of capture 's gone. Success means, they may snuff,
Examine, and report, — a brother, sure enough,
Disports him in brute-guise; for skin is truly skin,
Horns, hoofs, are hoofs and horns, and all, outside and in,
Is veritable beast, whom fellow-beasts resigned
May follow, made a prize in honest pride, behind
One of themselves and not creation's upstart lord!
Well, there 's your prize i' the pound — much joy may it afford
My Indian! Make survey and tell me, — was it worth
You acted part so well, went all-fours upon earth
The live-long day, brayed, belled, and all to bring to pass
That stags should deign eat hay when winter stints them grass?

LXXVI.

So much for men, and how disguise may make them mind
Their master. But you have to deal with womankind?
Abandon stratagem for strategy! Cast quite
The vile disguise away, try truth clean-opposite
Such creep-and-crawl, stand forth all man and, might it chance,
Somewhat of angel too! — whate'er inheritance,
Actual on earth, in heaven prospective, be your boast,
Lay claim to! Your best self revealed at uttermost, —
That 's the wise way o' the strong! And e'en should falsehood tempt
The weaker sort to swerve, — at least the lie 's exempt
From slur, that 's loathlier still, of aiming to debase
Rather than elevate its object. Mimic grace,
Not make deformity your mask! Be sick by stealth,
Nor traffic with disease — malingering in health!
No more of: "Countrymen, I boast me one like you —
My lot, the common strength, the common weakness too!
I think the thoughts you think; and if I have the knack

Of fitting thoughts to words, you peradventure lack,
Envy me not the chance, yourselves more fortunate!
Many the loaded ship self-sunk through treasure-freight,
Many the pregnant brain brought never child to birth,
Many the great heart broke beneath its girdle-girth!
Be mine the privilege to supplement defect,
Give dumbness voice, and let the laboring intellect
Find utterance in word, or possibly in deed!
What though I seem to go before? 't is you that lead!
I follow what I see so plain — the general mind
Projected pillar-wise, flame kindled by the kind,
Which dwarfs the unit — me — to insignificance!
Halt you, I stop forthwith, — proceed, I too advance!"

LXXVII.

Ay, that 's the way to take with men you wish to lead,
Instruct, and benefit. Small prospect you succeed
With women so! Be all that 's great and good and wise,
August, sublime — swell out your frog the right ox-size —
He 's buoyed like a balloon, to soar, not burst, you 'll see!
The more you prove yourself, less fear the prize will flee
The captor. Here you start after no pompous stag
Who condescends be snared, with toss of horn, and brag
Of bray, and ramp of hoof; you have not to subdue
The foe through letting him imagine he snares you!
'T is rather with . . .

LXXVIII.

Ah, thanks! quick — where the dipping disk
Shows red against the rise and fall o' the fin! there frisk
In shoal the — porpoises? Dolphins, they shall and must
Cut through the freshening clear — dolphins, my instance just!
'T is fable, therefore truth: who has to do with these,
Needs never practise trick of going hands and knees
As beasts require. Art fain the fish to captivate?
Gather thy greatness round, Arion! Stand in state,
As when the banqueting thrilled conscious — like a rose
Throughout its hundred leaves at that approach it knows
Of music in the bird — while Corinth grew one breast
A-throb for song and thee; nay, Periander pressed
The Methymnæan hand, and felt a king indeed, and guessed
How Phœbus' self might give that great mouth of the gods
Such a magnificence of song! The pillar nods,
Rocks roof, and trembles door, gigantic, post and jamb,
As harp and voice rend air — the shattering dithyramb!
So stand thou, and assume the robe that tingles yet

With triumph; strike the harp, whose every golden fret
Still smoulders with the flame, was late at fingers' end —
So, standing on the bench o' the ship, let voice expend
Thy soul, sing, unalloyed by meaner mode, thine own,
The Orthian lay; then leap from music's lofty throne
Into the lowest surge, make fearlessly thy launch!
Whatever storm may threat, some dolphin will be stanch!
Whatever roughness rage, some exquisite sea-thing
Will surely rise to save, will bear — palpitating —
One proud humility of love beneath its load —
Stem tide, part wave, till both roll on, thy jewell'd road
Of triumph, and the grim o' the gulf grow wonder-white
I' the phosphorescent wake; and still the exquisite
Sea-thing stems on, saves still, palpitatingly thus,
Lands safe at length its load of love at Tænarus,
True woman-creature!

LXXIX.

Man? Ah, would you prove what power
Marks man, — what fruit his tree may yield, beyond the sour
And stinted crab, he calls love-apple, which remains
After you toil and moil your utmost, — all, love gains
By lavishing manure? — try quite the other plan!
And, to obtain the strong true product of a man,
Set him to hate a little! Leave cherishing his root,
And rather prune his branch, nip off the pettiest shoot
Superfluous on his bough! I promise, you shall learn
By what grace came the goat, of all beasts else, to earn
Such favor with the god o' the grape: 't was only he
Who, browsing on its tops, first stung fertility
Into the stock's heart, stayed much growth of tendril-twine,
Some faintish flower, perhaps, but gained the indignant wine,
Wrath of the red press! Catch the puniest of the kind —
Man-animalcule, starved body, stunted mind,
And, as you nip the blotch 'twixt thumb and finger-nail,
Admire how heaven above and earth below avail
No jot to soothe the mite, sore at God's prime offence
In making mites at all, — coax from its impotence
One virile drop of thought, or word, or deed, by strain
To propagate for once — which nature rendered vain,
Who lets first failure stay, yet cares not to record
Mistake that seems to cast opprobrium on the Lord!
Such were the gain from love's best pains! But let the elf
Be touched with hate, because some real man bears himself
Manlike in body and soul, and, since he lives, must thwart
And furify and set a-fizz this counterpart

O' the pismire that 's surprised to effervescence, if,
By chance, black bottle come in contact with chalk cliff,
Acid with alkali! Then thrice the bulk, out blows
Our insect, does its kind, and cuckoo-spits some rose!

LXXX.

No — 't is ungainly work, the ruling men, at best!
The graceful instinct 's right: 't is women stand confessed
Auxiliary, the gain that never goes away,
Takes nothing and gives all: Elvire, Fifine, 't is they
Convince, — if little, much, no matter! — one degree
The more, at least, convince unreasonable me
That I am, anyhow, a truth, though all else seem
And be not: if I dream, at least I know I dream.
The falsity, beside, is fleeting: I can stand
Still, and let truth come back, — your steadying touch of hand
Assists me to remain self-centred, fixed amid
All on the move. Believe in me, at once you bid
Myself believe that, since one soul has disengaged
Mine from the shows of things, so much is fact: I waged
No foolish warfare, then, with shades, myself a shade,
Here in the world — may hope my pains will be repaid!
How false things are, I judge: how changeable, I learn:
When, where, and how it is I shall see truth return,
That I expect to know, because Fifine knows me! —
How much more, if Elvire!

LXXXI.

"And why not, only she?
Since there can be for each, one Best, no more, such Best,
For body and mind of him, abolishes the rest
O' the simply Good and Better. You please select Elvire
To give you this belief in truth, dispel the fear
Yourself are, after all, as false as what surrounds;
And why not be content? When we two watched the rounds
The boatman made, 'twixt shoal and sandbank, yesterday,
As, at dead slack of tide, he chose to push his way,
With oar and pole, across the creek, and reach the isle
After a world of pains — my word provoked your smile,
Yet none the less deserved reply: ''T were wiser wait
The turn o' the tide, and find conveyance for his freight —
How easily—within the ship to purpose moored,
Managed by sails, not oars! But no, — the man 's allured
By liking for the new and hard in his exploit!
First come shall serve! He makes — courageous and adroit —
The merest willow-leaf of boat do duty, bear

His merchandise across: once over, needs he care
If folk arrive by ship, six hours hence, fresh and gay?'
No: he scorns commonplace, affects the unusual way;
And good Elvire is moored, with not a breath to flap
The yards of her, no lift of ripple to o'erlap
Keel, much less, prow. What care? since here's a cockle-shell,
Fifine, that's taut and crank, and carries just as well
Such seamanship as yours!"

LXXXII.

. Alack, our life is lent,
From first to last, the whole, for this experiment
Of proving what I say — that we ourselves are true!
I would there were one voyage, and then no more to do
But tread the firm land, tempt the uncertain sea no more.
I would we might dispense with change of shore for shore
To evidence our skill, demonstrate — in no dream
It was, we tided o'er the trouble of the stream.
I would the steady voyage, and not the fitful trip, —
Elvire, and not Fifine, — might test our seamanship.
But why expend one's breath to tell you, change of boat
Means change of tactics too? Come see the same afloat
To-morrow, all the change, new stowage fore and aft
O' the cargo; then, to cross requires new sailor-craft!
To-day, one step from stern to bow keeps boat in trim:
To-morrow, some big stone — or woe to boat and him! —
Must ballast both. That man stands for Mind, paramount
Throughout the adventure: ay, howe'er you make account,
'T is mind that navigates, — skips over, twists between
The bales i' the boat, — now gives importance to the mean,
And now abates the pride of life, accepts all fact,
Discards all fiction, — steers Fifine, and cries, i' the act,
"Thou art so bad, and yet so delicate a brown!
Wouldst tell no end of lies: I talk to smile or frown!
Wouldst rob me: do men blame a squirrel, lithe and sly,
For pilfering the nut she adds to hoard? Nor I.
Elvire is true, as truth, honesty's self, alack!
The worse! too safe the ship, the transport there and back
Too certain! one may loll and lounge and leave the helm,
Let wind and tide do work: no fear that waves o'erwhelm
The steady-going bark, as sure to feel her way
Blindfold across, reach land, next year as yesterday!
How can I but suspect, the true feat were to slip
Down side, transfer myself to cockle-shell from ship,
And try if, trusting to sea-tracklessness, I class
With those around whose breast grew oak and triple brass:

Who dreaded no degree of death, but, with dry eyes,
Surveyed the turgid main and its monstrosities —
And rendered futile so, the prudent Power's decree
Of separate earth and disassociating sea;
Since, how is it observed, if impious vessels leap
Across, and tempt a thing they should not touch — the deep?
(See Horace to the boat, wherein, for Athens bound,
When Virgil must embark — Jove keep him safe and sound! —
The poet bade his friend start on the watery road,
Much reassured by this so comfortable ode.)

LXXXIII.

Then, never grudge my poor Fifine her compliment!
The rakish craft could slip her moorings in the tent,
And, hoisting every stitch of spangled canvas, steer
Through divers rocks and shoals, — in fine, deposit here
Your Virgil of a spouse, in Attica: yea, thrid
The mob of men, select the special virtue hid
In him, forsooth, and say — or rather, smile so sweet,
"Of all the multitude, you — I prefer to cheat!
Are you for Athens bound? I can perform the trip,
Shove little pinnace off, while yon superior ship,
The Elvire, refits in port!" So, off we push from beach
Of Pornic town, and lo, ere eye can wink, we reach
The Long Walls, and I prove that Athens is no dream,
For there the temples rise! they are, they nowise seem!
Earth is not all one lie, this truth attests me true!
Thanks therefore to Fifine! Elvire, I'm back with you!
Share in the memories! Embark I trust we shall
Together some fine day, and so, for good and all,
Bid Pornic Town adieu, — then, just the strait to cross,
And we reach harbor, safe, in Iostephanos!

LXXXIV.

How quickly night comes! Lo, already 't is the land
Turns sea-like; overcrept by gray, the plains expand,
Assume significance; while ocean dwindles, shrinks
Into a pettier bound: its plash and plaint, methinks,
Six steps away, how both retire, as if their part
Were played, another force were free to prove her art,
Protagonist in turn! Are you unterrified?
All false, all fleeting too! And nowhere things abide,
And everywhere we strain that things should stay, — the one
Truth, that ourselves are true!

LXXXV.

A word, and I have done.
Is it not just our hate of falsehood, fleetingness,
And the mere part, things play, that constitutes express
The inmost charm of this Fifine and all her tribe?
Actors! We also act, but only they inscribe
Their style and title so, and preface, only they,
Performance with "A lie is all we do or say."
Wherein but there can be the attraction, Falsehood's bribe,
That wins so surely o'er to Fifine and her tribe
The liking, nay the love of who hate Falsehood most,
Except that these alone of mankind make their boast
"Frankly, we simulate!" To feign, means — to have grace
And so get gratitude! This ruler of the race,
Crowned, sceptred, stoled to suit, — 't is not that you detect
The cobbler in the king, but that he makes effect
By seeming the reverse of what you know to be
The man, the mind, whole form, fashion, and quality.
Mistake his false for true, one minute, — there 's an end
Of the admiration! Truth, we grieve at or rejoice:
'T is only falsehood, plain in gesture, look and voice,
That brings the praise desired, since profit comes thereby.
The histrionic truth is in the natural lie.
Because the man who wept the tears was, all the time,
Happy enough; because the other man, a-grime
With guilt, was, at the least, as white as I and you;
Because the timid type of bashful maidhood, who
Starts at her own pure shade, already numbers seven
Born babes and, in a month, will turn their odd to even;
Because the saucy prince would prove, could you unfurl
Some yards of wrap, a meek and meritorious girl —
Precisely as you see success attained by each
O' the mimes, do you approve, not foolishly impeach
The falsehood!

LXXXVI.

That 's the first o' the truths found: all things, slow
Or quick i' the passage, come at last to that, you know!
Each has a false outside, whereby a truth is forced
To issue from within: truth, falsehood, are divorced
By the excepted eye, at the rare season, for
The happy moment. Life means — learning to abhor
The false, and love the true, truth treasured snatch by snatch,
Waifs counted at their worth. And when with strays they match

I' the particolored world, — when, under foul, shines fair,
And truth, displayed i' the point, flashes forth everywhere
I' the circle, manifest to soul, though hid from sense,
And no obstruction more affects this confidence, —
When faith is ripe for sight, — why, reasonably, then
Comes the great clearing-up. Wait threescore years and ten!

LXXXVII.

Therefore I prize stage-play, the honest cheating; thence
The impulse pricked, when fife and drum bade Fair commence,
To bid you trip and skip, link arm in arm with me,
Like husband and like wife, and so together see
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage.
And if I started thence upon abstruser themes . . .
Well, 't was a dream, pricked too!

LXXXVIII.

A poet never dreams:
We prose-folk always do: we miss the proper duct
For thoughts on things unseen, which stagnate and obstruct
The system, therefore; mind, sound in a body sane,
Keeps thoughts apart from facts, and to one flowing vein
Confines its sense of that which is not, but might be,
And leaves the rest alone. What ghosts do poets see?
What dæmons fear? what man or thing misapprehend?
Unchoked, the channel 's flush, the fancy 's free to spend
Its special self aright in manner, time, and place.
Never believe that who create the busy race
O' the brain, bring poetry to birth, such act performed,
Feel trouble them, the same, such residue as warmed
My prosy blood, this morn, — intrusive fancies, meant
For outbreak and escape by quite another vent!
Whence follows that, asleep, my dreamings oft exceed
The bound. But you shall hear.

LXXXIX.

I smoked. The webs o' the weed,
With many a break i' the mesh, were floating to re-form
Cupola-wise above: chased thither by soft warm
Inflow of air without; since I — of mind to muse, to clench
The gain of soul and body, got by their noonday drench
In sun and sea — had flung both frames o' the window wide,
To soak my body still and let soul soar beside.
In came the country sounds and sights and smells — that fine
Sharp needle in the nose from our fermenting wine!

In came a dragon-fly with whir and stir, then out,
Off and away: in came, — kept coming, rather, — pout
Succeeding smile, and take-away still close on give, —
One loose long creeper-branch, tremblingly sensitive
To risks, which blooms and leaves, — each leaf tongue-broad, each bloom
Midfinger-deep, — must run by prying in the room
Of one who loves and grasps and spoils and speculates.
All so far plain enough to sight and sense: but, weights,
Measures and numbers, — ah, could one apply such test
To other visitants that came at no request
Of who kept open house, — to fancies manifold
From this four-cornered world, the memories new and old,
The antenatal prime experience — what know I? —
The initiatory love preparing us to die —
Such were a crowd to count, a sight to see, a prize
To turn to profit, were but fleshly ears and eyes
Able to cope with those o' the spirit!

XC.

Therefore, — since
Thought hankers after speech, while no speech may evince
Feeling like music, — mine, o'erburdened with each gift
From every visitant, at last resolved to shift
Its burden to the back of some musician dead
And gone, who feeling once what I feel now, instead
Of words, sought sounds, and saved forever, in the same,
Truth that escapes prose, — nay, puts poetry to shame.
I read the note, I strike the key, I bid *record*
The instrument — thanks greet the veritable word!
And not in vain I urge: "O dead and gone away,
Assist who struggles yet, thy strength become my stay,
Thy record serve as well to register — I felt
And knew thus much of truth! With me, must knowledge melt
Into surmise and doubt and disbelief, unless
Thy music reassure — I gave no idle guess,
But gained a certitude, I yet may hardly keep!
What care? since round is piled a monumental heap
Of music that conserves the assurance, thou as well
Wast certain of the same! thou, master of the spell,
Mad'st moonbeams marble, didst *record* what other men
Feel only to forget!" Who was it helped me, then?
What master's work first came responsive to my call,
Found my eye, fixed my choice?

XCI.

Why, Schumann's "Carnival!"
My choice chimed in, you see, exactly with the sounds
And sights of yestereve, when, going on my rounds,
Where both roads join the bridge, I heard across the dusk
Creak a slow caravan, and saw arrive the husk
O' the spice-nut, which peeled off this morning, and displayed,
'Twixt tree and tree, a tent whence the red pennon made
Its vivid reach for home and ocean-idleness —
And where, my heart surmised, at that same moment, — yes, —
Tugging her tricot on, — yet tenderly, lest stitch
Announce the crack of doom, reveal disaster which
Our Pornic's modest stock of merceries in vain
Were ransacked to retrieve, — there, cautiously a-strain,
(My heart surmised) must crouch in that tent's corner, curved
Like Spring-month's russet moon, some girl by fate reserved
To give me once again the electric snap and spark
Which prove, when finger finds out finger in the dark
O' the world, there 's fire and life and truth there, link but hands
And pass the secret on. Lo, link by link, expands
The circle, lengthens out the chain, till one embrace
Of high with low is found uniting the whole race,
Not simply you and me and our Fifine, but all
The world: the Fair expands into the Carnival,
And Carnival again to . . . ah, but that 's my dream!

XCII.

I somehow played the piece: remarked on each old theme
I' the new dress; saw how food o' the soul, the stuff that 's made
To furnish man with thought and feeling, is purveyed
Substantially the same from age to age, with change
Of the outside only for successive feasters. Range
The banquet-room o' the world, from the dim farthest head
O' the table, to its foot, for you and me bespread,
This merry morn, we find sufficient fare, I trow.
But, novel? Scrape away the sauce; and taste, below,
The verity o' the viand, — you shall perceive there went
To board-head just the dish which other condiment
Makes palatable now: guests came, sat down, fell-to,
Rose up, wiped mouth, went way, — lived, died, — and never knew
That generations yet should, seeking sustenance,
Still find the selfsame fare, with somewhat to enhance
Its flavor, in the kind of cooking. As with hates

And loves and fears and hopes, so with what emulates
The same, expresses hates, loves, fears, and hopes in Art:
The forms, the themes — no one without its counterpart
Ages ago; no one but, mumbled the due time
I' the mouth of the eater, needs be cooked again in rhyme,
Dished up anew in paint, sauce-smothered fresh in sound,
To suit the wisdom-tooth, just cut, of the age, that 's found
With gums obtuse to gust and smack which relished so
The meat o' the meal folk made some fifty years ago.
But don't suppose the new was able to efface
The old without a struggle, a pang! The commonplace
Still clung about his heart, long after all the rest
O' the natural man, at eye and ear, was caught, confessed
The charm of change, although wry lip and wrinkled nose
Owned ancient virtue more conducive to repose
Than modern nothings roused to somethings by some shred
Of pungency, perchance garlic in amber's stead.
And so on, till one day, another age, by due
Rotation, pries, sniffs, smacks, discovers old is new,
And sauce, our sires pronounced insipid, proves again
Sole piquant, may resume its titillating reign —
With music, most of all the arts, since change is there
The law, and not the lapse: the precious means the rare,
And not the absolute in all good save surprise.
So I remarked upon our Schumann's victories
Over the commonplace, how faded phrase grew fine,
And pallid perfection — piqued, up-startled by that brine,
His pickle — bit the mouth and burnt the tongue aright,
Beyond the merely good no longer exquisite:
Then took things as I found, and thanked without demur
The pretty piece — played through that movement, you prefer,
Where dance and shuffle past, — he scolding while she pouts,
She canting while he calms, — in those eternal bouts
Of age, the dog — with youth, the cat — by rose-festoon
Tied teasingly enough — Columbine, Pantaloon:
She, toe-tips and *staccato*, — *legato*, shakes his poll
And shambles in pursuit, the senior. *Fi la folle!*
Lie to him! get his gold and pay its price! begin
Your trade betimes, nor wait till you 've wed Harlequin
And need, at the week's end, to play the duteous wife,
And swear you still love slaps and leapings more than life!
Pretty! I say.

XCIII.

And so, I somehow-nohow played
The whole o' the pretty piece; and then . . . whatever weighed

My eyes down, furled the films about my wits? suppose,
The morning-bath, — the sweet monotony of those
Three keys, flat, flat and flat, never a sharp at all, —
Or else the brain's fatigue, forced even here to fall
Into the same old track, and recognize the shift
From old to new, and back to old again, and, — swift
Or slow, no matter, — still the certainty of change,
Conviction we shall find the false, where'er we range,
In art no less than nature: or what if wrist were numb,
And over-tense the muscle, abductor of the thumb,
Taxed by those tenths' and twelfths' unconscionable stretch?
Howe'er it came to pass, I soon was far to fetch —
Gone off in company with Music!

XCIV.

Whither bound
Except for Venice? She it was, by instinct found
Carnival-country proper, who far below the perch
Where I was pinnacled, showed, opposite, Mark's Church,
And, underneath, Mark's Square, with those two lines of street,
Procuratié-sides, each leading to my feet —
Since from above I gazed, however I got there.

XCV.

And what I gazed upon was a prodigious Fair,
Concourse immense of men and women, crowned or casqued,
Turbaned or tiar'd, wreathed, plumed, hatted or wigged, but masked —
Always masked, — only, how? No face-shape, beast or bird,
Nay, fish and reptile even, but someone had preferred,
From out its frontispiece, feathered or scaled or curled,
To make the vizard whence himself should view the world,
And where the world believed himself was manifest.
Yet when you came to look, mixed up among the rest
More funnily by far, were masks to imitate
Humanity's mishap: the wrinkled brow, bald pate,
And rheumy eyes of Age, peak'd chin and parchment chap,
Were signs of day-work done, and wage-time near, — mishap
Merely; but, Age reduced to simple greed and guile,
Worn apathetic else as some smooth slab, erewhile
A clear-cut man-at-arms i' the pavement, till foot's tread
Effaced the sculpture, left the stone you saw instead, —
Was not that terrible beyond the mere uncouth?
Well, and perhaps the next revolting you was Youth,
Stark ignorance and crude conceit, half smirk, half stare
On that frank fool-face, gay beneath its head of hair
Which covers nothing.

XCVI.

These, you are to understand,
Were the mere hard and sharp distinctions. On each hand,
I soon became aware, flocked the infinitude
Of passions, loves and hates, man pampers till his mood
Becomes himself, the whole sole face we name him by,
Nor want denotement else, if age or youth supply
The rest of him: old, young, — classed creature: in the main
A love, a hate, a hope, a fear, each soul a-strain
Some one way through the flesh — the face, an evidence
O' the soul at work inside; and, all the more intense,
So much the more grotesque.

XCVII.

"Why should each soul be tasked
Some one way, by one love or else one hate?" I asked.
When it occurred to me, from all these sights beneath
There rose not any sound: a crowd, yet dumb as death!

XCVIII.

Soon I knew why. (Propose a riddle, and 't is solved
Forthwith — in dream!) They spoke; but, since on me devolved
To see, and understand by sight, — the vulgar speech
Might be dispensed with. "He who cannot see, must reach
As best he may the truth of men by help of words
They please to speak, must fare at will of who affords
The banquet," — so I thought. "Who sees not, hears and so
Gets to believe; myself it is that, seeing, know,
And, knowing, can dispense with voice and vanity
Of speech. What hinders then, that, drawing closer, I
Put privilege to use, see and know better still
These *simulacra*, taste the profit of my skill,
Down in the midst?"

XCIX.

And plumb I pitched into the square —
A groundling like the rest. What think you happened there?
Precise the contrary of what one would expect!
For, — whereas, so much more monstrosities deflect
From nature and the type, as you the more approach
Their precinct, — here, I found brutality encroach
Less on the human, lie the lightlier as I looked
The nearlier on these faces that seemed but now so crook'd
And clawed away from God's prime purpose. They diverged
A little from the type, but somehow rather urged

To pity than disgust: the prominent, before,
Now dwindled into mere distinctness, nothing more.
Still, at first sight, stood forth undoubtedly the fact
Some deviation was: in no one case there lacked
The certain sign and mark, say hint, say, trick of lip
Or twist of nose, that proved a fault in workmanship,
Change in the prime design, some hesitancy here
And there, which checked the man and let the beast appear;
But that was all.

C.

All; yet enough to bid each tongue
Lie in abeyance still. They talked, themselves among,
Of themselves, to themselves; I saw the mouths at play,
The gesture that enforced, the eye that strove to say
The same thing as the voice, and seldom gained its point
— That this was so, I saw; but all seemed out of joint
I' the vocal medium 'twixt the world and me. I gained
Knowledge by notice, not by giving ear, — attained
To truth by what men seemed, not said: to me one glance
Was worth whole histories of noisy utterance,
— At least, to me in dream.

CI.

And presently I found
That, just as ugliness had withered, so unwound
Itself, and perished off, repugnance to what wrong
Might linger yet i' the make of man. My will was strong
I' the matter; I could pick and choose, project my weight:
(Remember how we saw the boatman trim his freight!)
Determine to observe, or manage to escape,
Or make divergency assume another shape
By shift of point of sight in me the observer: thus
Corrected, added to, subtracted from, — discuss
Each variant quality, and brute-beast touch was turned
Into mankind's safeguard! Force, guile, were arms which earned
My praise, not blame at all: for we must learn to live,
Case-hardened at all points, not bare and sensitive,
But plated for defence, nay, furnished for attack,
With spikes at the due place, that neither front nor back
May suffer in that squeeze with nature, we find — life.
Are we not here to learn the good of peace through strife,
Of love through hate, and reach knowledge by ignorance?
Why, those are helps thereto, which late we eyed askance,
And nicknamed unaware! Just so, a sword we call

Superfluous, and cry out against, at festival:
Wear it in time of war, its clink and clatter grate
O' the ear to purpose then!

CII.

I found, one must abate
One's scorn of the soul's casing, distinct from the soul's self—
Which is the centre-drop: whereas the pride in pelf,
The lust to seem the thing it cannot be, the greed
For praise, and all the rest seen outside,—these indeed
Are the hard polished cold crystal environment
Of those strange orbs unearthed i' the Druid temple, meant
For divination (so the learned please to think)
Wherein you may admire one dewdrop roll and wink,
All unaffected by—quite alien to—what sealed
And saved it long ago: though how it got congealed
I shall not give a guess, nor how, by power occult,
The solid surface-shield was outcome and result
Of simple dew at work to save itself amid
The unwatery force around; protected thus, dew slid
Safe through all opposites, impatient to absorb
Its spot of life, and lasts forever in the orb
We, now, from hand to hand pass with impunity.

CIII.

And the delight wherewith I watch this crowd must be
Akin to that which crowns the chemist when he winds
Thread up and up, till clue be fairly clutched,—unbinds
The composite, ties fast the simple to its mate,
And, tracing each effect back to its cause, elate,
Constructs in fancy, from the fewest primitives,
The complex and complete, all diverse life, that lives
Not only in beast, bird, fish, reptile, insect, but
The very plants and earths and ores. Just so I glut
My hunger both to be and know the thing I am,
By contrast with the thing I am not; so, through sham
And outside, I arrive at inmost real, probe
And prove how the nude form obtained the checkered robe.

CIV.

—Experience, I am glad to master soon or late,
Here, there, and everywhere i' the world, without debate!
Only, in Venice why? What reason for Mark's Square
Rather than Timbuctoo?

CV.

And I became aware,
Scarcely the word escaped my lips, that swift ensued
In silence and by stealth, and yet with certitude,
A formidable change of the amphitheatre
Which held the Carnival; although the human stir
Continued just the same amid that shift of scene.

CVI.

For as on edifice of cloud i' the gray and green
Of evening, — built about some glory of the west,
To barricade the sun's departure, — manifest,
He plays, pre-eminently gold, gilds vapor, crag and crest
Which bend in rapt suspense above the act and deed
They cluster round and keep their very own, nor heed
The world at watch; while we, breathlessly at the base
O' the castellated bulk, note momently the mace
Of night fall here, fall there, bring change with every blow,
Alike to sharpened shaft and broadened portico
I' the structure: heights and depths, beneath the leaden stress,
Crumble and melt and mix together, coalesce,
Re-form, but sadder still, subdued yet more and more
By every fresh defeat, till wearied eyes need pore
No longer on the dull impoverished decadence
Of all that pomp of pile in towering evidence
So lately: —

CVII.

Even thus nor otherwise, meseemed
That if I fixed my gaze awhile on what I dreamed
Was Venice' Square, Mark's Church, the scheme was straight unschemed,
A subtle something had its way within the heart
Of each and every house I watched, with counterpart
Of tremor through the front and outward face, until
Mutation was at end; impassive and stock-still
Stood now the ancient house, grown — new, is scarce the phrase,
Since older, in a sense, — altered to . . . what i' the ways,
Ourselves are wont to see, coerced by city, town,
Or village, anywhere i' the world, pace up or down
Europe! In all the maze, no single tenement
I saw, but I could claim acquaintance with.

CVIII.

There went
Conviction to my soul, that what I took of late
For Venice was the world; its Carnival — the state
Of mankind, masquerade in life-long permanence
For all time, and no one particular feast-day. Whence
'T was easy to infer what meant my late disgust
At the brute-pageant, each grotesque of greed and lust
And idle hate, and love as impotent for good —
When from my pride of place I passed the interlude
In critical review; and what, the wonder that ensued
When, from such pinnacled pre-eminence, I found
Somehow the proper goal for wisdom was the ground
And not the sky, — so, slid sagaciously betimes
Down heaven's baluster-rope, to reach the mob of mimes
And mummers; whereby came discovery there was just
Enough and not too much of hate, love, greed and lust,
Could one discerningly but hold the balance, shift
The weight from scale to scale, do justice to the drift
Of nature, and explain the glories by the shames
Mixed up in man, one stuff miscalled by different names
According to what stage i' the process turned his rough,
Even as I gazed, to smooth — only get close enough!
— What was all this except the lesson of a life?

CIX.

And — consequent upon the learning how from strife
Grew peace — from evil, good — came knowledge that, to get
Acquaintance with the way o' the world, we must nor fret
Nor fume, on altitudes of self-sufficiency,
But bid a frank farewell to what — we think — should be,
And, with as good a grace, welcome what is — we find.

CX.

Is — for the hour, observe! Since something to my mind
Suggested soon the fancy, nay, certitude that change,
Never suspending touch, continued to derange
What architecture, we, walled up within the cirque
O' the world, consider fixed as fate, not fairy-work.
For those were temples, sure, which tremblingly grew blank
From bright, then broke afresh in triumph, — ah, but sank
As soon, for liquid change through artery and vein
O' the very marble wound its way! And first a stain
Would startle and offend amid the glory; next,
Spot swift succeeded spot, but found me less perplexed

By portents; then, as 't were, a sleepiness soft stole
Over the stately fane, and shadow sucked the whole
Façade into itself, made uniformly earth
What was a piece of heaven; till, lo, a second birth,
And the veil broke away because of something new
Inside, that pushed to gain an outlet, paused in view
At last, and proved a growth of stone or brick or wood
Which, alien to the aim o' the Builder, somehow stood
The test, could satisfy, if not the early race
For whom he built, at least our present populace,
Who must not bear the blame for what, blamed, proves mishap
Of the Artist: his work gone, another fills the gap,
Serves the prime purpose so. Undoubtedly there spreads
Building around, above, which makes men lift their heads
To look at, or look through, or look — for aught I care —
Over: if only up, it is, not down, they stare,
"Commercing with the skies," and not the pavement in the
Square.

CXI.

But are they only temples that subdivide, collapse,
And tower again, transformed? Academies, perhaps!
Domes where dwells Learning, seats of Science, bower and hall
Which house Philosophy — do these, too, rise and fall,
Based though foundations be on steadfast mother-earth,
With no chimeric claim to supermundane birth,
No boast that, dropped from cloud, they did not grow from
ground?
Why, these fare worst of all! these vanish and are found
Nowhere, by who tasks eye some twice within his term
Of threescore years and ten, for tidings what each germ
Has burgeoned out into, whereof the promise stunned
His ear with such acclaim, — praise-payment to refund
The praisers, never doubt, some twice before they die
Whose days are long i' the land.

CXII.

Alack, Philosophy!
Despite the chop and change, diminished or increased,
Patched-up and plastered-o'er, Religion stands at least
I' the temple-type. But thou? Here gape I, all agog
These thirty years, to learn how tadpole turns to frog;
And thrice at least have gazed with mild astonishment,
As, skyward up and up, some fire-new fabric sent
Its challenge to mankind, that, clustered underneath
To hear the word, they straight believe, ay, in the teeth

O' the Past, clap hands, and hail triumphant Truth's out-
break —
Tadpole-frog-theory propounded past mistake!
In vain! A something ails the edifice, it bends,
It bows, it buries . . . Haste! cry "Heads below" to friends —
But have no fear they find, when smother shall subside,
Some substitution perk with unabated pride
I' the predecessor's place!

CXIII.

No, — the one voice which failed
Never, the preachment's coigne of vantage nothing ailed, —
That had the luck to lodge i' the house not made with hands!
And all it preached was this: "Truth builds upon the sands,
Though stationed on a rock: and so her work decays,
And so she builds afresh, with like result. Nought stays
But just the fact that Truth not only is, but fain
Would have men know she needs must be, by each so plain
Attempt to visibly inhabit where they dwell."
Her works are work, while she is she; that work does well
Which lasts mankind their lifetime through, and lets believe
One generation more, that, though sand run through sieve,
Yet earth now reached is rock, and what we moderns find
Erected here is Truth, who, 'stablished to her mind
I' the fulness of the days, will never change in show
More than in substance erst: men thought they knew; we
know!

CXIV.

Do you, my generation? Well, let the blocks prove mist
I' the main enclosure, — church and college, if they list,
Be something for a time, and everything anon,
And anything awhile, as fit is off or on,
Till they grow nothing, soon to reappear no less
As something, — shape reshaped, till out of shapelessness
Come shape again as sure! no doubt, or round or square
Or polygon its front, some building will be there,
Do duty in that nook o' the wall o' the world where once
The Architect saw fit precisely to ensconce
College or church, and bid such bulwark guard the line
O' the barrier round about, humanity's confine.

CXV.

Leave watching change at work i' the greater scale, on these
The main supports, and turn to their interstices
Filled up by fabrics too, less costly and less rare,

Yet of importance, yet essential to the Fair
They help to circumscribe, instruct, and regulate!
See, where each booth-front boasts, in letters small or great,
Its specialty, proclaims its privilege to stop
A breach, beside the best!

CXVI.

Here History keeps shop,
Tells how past deeds were done, so and not otherwise:
"Man! hold truth evermore! forget the early lies!"
There sits Morality, demure behind her stall,
Dealing out life and death: "This is the thing to call
Right, and this other, wrong; thus think, thus do, thus say,
Thus joy, thus suffer! — not to-day as yesterday —
Yesterday's doctrine dead, this only shall endure!
Obey its voice and live!" — enjoins the dame demure.
While Art gives flag to breeze, bids drum beat, trumpet blow,
Inviting eye and ear to yonder raree-show.
Up goes the canvas, hauled to height of pole. I think,
We know the way — long lost, late learned — to paint! A wink
Of eye, and lo, the pose! the statue on its plinth!
How could we moderns miss the heart o' the labyrinth
Perversely all these years, permit the Greek seclude
His secret till to-day? And here 's another feud
Now happily composed: inspect this quartet-score!
Got long past melody, no word has Music more
To say to mortal man! But is the bard to be
Behindhand? Here 's his book, and now perhaps you see
At length what poetry can do!

CXVII.

Why, that 's stability
Itself, that change on change we sorrowfully saw
Creep o'er the prouder piles! We acquiesced in law
When the fine gold grew dim i' the temple, when the brass
Which pillared that so brave abode where Knowledge was,
Bowed and resigned the trust; but, bear all this caprice,
Harlequinade where swift to birth succeeds decease
Of hue at every turn o' the tinsel-flag which flames
While Art holds booth in Fair? Such glories chased by shames
Like these, distract beyond the solemn and august
Procedure to decay, evanishment in dust,
Of those marmoreal domes, — above vicissitude,
We used to hope!

CXVIII.

"So, all is change, in fine," pursued
The preachment to a pause. When — "All is permanence!"
Returned a voice. Within? without? No matter whence
The explanation came: for, understand, I ought
To simply say — "I saw," each thing I say "I thought."
Since ever, as, unrolled, the strange scene-picture grew
Before me, sight flashed first, though mental comment too
Would follow in a trice, come hobblingly to halt.

CXIX.

So, what did I see next but, — much as when the vault
I' the west, — wherein we watch the vapory, manifold
Transfiguration, — tired turns blaze to black, — behold,
Peak reconciled to base, dark ending feud with bright,
The multiform subsides, becomes the definite.
Contrasting life and strife, where battle they i' the blank
Severity of peace in death, for which we thank
One wind that comes to quell the concourse, drive at last
Things to a shape which suits the close of things, and cast
Palpably o'er vexed earth heaven's mantle of repose?

CXX.

Just so, in Venice' Square, that things were at the close
Was signalled to my sense; for I perceived arrest
O' the change all round about. As if some impulse pressed
Each gently into each, what was distinctness, late,
Grew vague, and, line from line no longer separate,
No matter what its style, edifice . . . shall I say,
Died into edifice? I find no simpler way
Of saying how, without or dash or shock or trace
Of violence, I found unity in the place
Of temple, tower, — nay, hall and house and hut, — one blank
Severity of peace in death; to which they sank
Resigned enough, till . . . ah, conjecture, I beseech,
What special blank did they agree to, all and each?
What common shape was that wherein they mutely merged
Likes and dislikes of form, so plain before?

CXXI.

I urged
Your step this way, prolonged our path of enterprise
To where we stand at last, in order that your eyes
Might see the very thing, and save my tongue describe
The Druid monument which fronts you. Could I bribe

Nature to come in aid, illustrate what I mean,
What wants there she should lend to solemnize the scene?

CXXII.

How does it strike you, this construction gaunt and gray —
Sole object, these piled stones, that gleam unground-away
By twilight's hungry jaw, which champs fine all beside
I' the solitary waste we grope through? Oh, no guide,
Need we to grope our way and reach the monstrous door
Of granite! Take my word, the deeper you explore
That caverned passage, filled with fancies to the brim,
The less will you approve the adventure! such a grim
Bar-sinister soon blocks abrupt your path, and ends
All with a cold dread shape, — shape whereon Learning spends
Labor, and leaves the text obscurer for the gloss,
While Ignorance reads right — recoiling from that Cross!
Whence came the mass and mass, strange quality of stone
Unquarried anywhere i' the region round? Unknown!
Just as unknown, how such enormity could be
Conveyed by land, or else transported over sea,
And laid in order, so, precisely each on each,
As you and I would build a grotto where the beach
Sheds shell — to last an hour: this building lasts from age
To age the same. But why?

CXXIII.

Ask Learning! I engage
You get a prosy wherefore, shall help you to advance
In knowledge just as much as helps you Ignorance
Surmising, in the mouth of peasant-lad or lass,
"I heard my father say he understood it was
A building, people built as soon as earth was made
Almost, because they might forget (they were afraid)
Earth did not make itself, but came of Somebody.
They labored that their work might last, and show thereby
He stays, while we and earth, and all things come and go.
Come whence? Go whither? That, when come and gone, we know
Perhaps, but not while earth and all things need our best
Attention: we must wait and die to know the rest.
Ask, if that's true, what use in setting up the pile?
To make one fear and hope: remind us, all the while
We come and go, outside there's Somebody that stays;
A circumstance which ought to make us mind our ways,
Because, — whatever end we answer by this life, —
Next time, best chance must be for who, with toil and strife,

Manages now to live most like what he was meant
Become: since who succeeds so far, 't is evident,
Stands foremost on the file; who fails, has less to hope
From new promotion. That 's the rule — with even a rope
Of mushrooms, like this rope I dangle! those that grew
Greatest and roundest, all in life they had to do,
Gain a reward, a grace they never dreamed, I think;
Since, outside white as milk and inside black as ink,
They go to the Great House to make a dainty dish
For Don and Donna; while this basket-load, I wish
Well off my arm, it breaks, — no starveling of the heap
But had his share of dew, his proper length of sleep
I' the sunshine: yet, of all, the outcome is — this queer
Cribbed quantity of dwarfs which burden basket here
Till I reach home; 't is there that, having run their rigs,
They end their earthly race, are flung as food for pigs.
Any more use I see? Well, you must know, there lies
Something, the Curé says, that points to mysteries
Above our grasp: a huge stone pillar, once upright,
Now laid at length, half-lost — discreetly shunning sight
I' the bush and brier, because of stories in the air —
Hints what it signified, and why was stationed there,
Once on a time. In vain the Curé tasked his lungs —
Showed, in a preachment, how, at bottom of the rungs
O' the ladder, Jacob saw, where heavenly angels stept
Up and down, lay a stone which served him, while he slept,
For pillow; when he woke, he set the same upright
As pillar, and a-top poured oil: things requisite
To instruct posterity, there mounts from floor to roof,
A staircase, earth to heaven; and also put in proof,
When we have scaled the sky, we well may let alone
What raised us from the ground, and — paying to the stone
Proper respect, of course — take staff and go our way,
Leaving the Pagan night for Christian break of day.
'For,' preached he, 'what they dreamed, these Pagans, wide-awake
We Christians may behold. How strange, then, were mistake
Did anybody style the stone, — because of drop
Remaining there from oil which Jacob poured a-top, —
Itself the Gate of Heaven, itself the end, and not
The means thereto!' Thus preached the Curé, and no jot
The more persuaded people but that, what once a thing
Meant and had right to mean, it still must mean. So cling
Folk somehow to the prime authoritative speech,
And so distrust report, it seems as they could reach
Far better the arch-word, whereon their fate depends,

Through rude charactery, than all the grace it lends,
That lettering of your scribes! who flourish pen apace
And ornament the text, they say — we say, efface.
Hence, when the earth began its life afresh in May,
And fruit-trees bloomed, and waves would wanton, and the bay
Ruffle its wealth of weed, and stranger-birds arrive,
And beasts take each a mate, — folk, too, found sensitive,
Surmised the old gray stone upright there, through such tracts
Of solitariness and silence, kept the facts
Entrusted it, could deal out doctrine, did it please:
No fresh and frothy draught, but liquor on the lees,
Strong, savage, and sincere: first bleedings from a vine
Whereof the product now do Curés so refine
To insipidity, that, when heart sinks, we strive
And strike from the old stone the old restorative.
'Which is?' — why, go and ask our grandames how they used
To dance around it, till the Curé disabused
Their ignorance, and bade the parish in a band
Lay flat the obtrusive thing that cumbered so the land!
And there, accordingly, in bush and brier it — 'bides
Its time to rise again!' (so somebody derides,
That's pert from Paris,) 'since, yon spire, you keep erect
Yonder, and pray beneath, is nothing, I suspect,
But just the symbol's self, expressed in slate for rock,
Art's smooth for Nature's rough, new chip from the old block!
There, sir, my say is said! Thanks, and Saint Gille increase
The wealth bestowed so well!" — wherewith he pockets piece,
Doffs cap, and takes the road. I leave in Learning's clutch
More money for his book, but scarcely gain as much.

CXXIV.

To this it was, this same primeval monument,
That, in my dream, I saw building with building blent
Fall: each on each they fast and founderingly went
Confusion-ward; but thence again subsided fast,
Became the mound you see. Magnificently massed
Indeed, those mammoth-stones, piled by the Protoplast
Temple-wise in my dream! beyond compare with fanes
Which, solid-looking late, had left no least remains
I' the bald and blank, now sole usurper of the plains
Of heaven, diversified and beautiful before.
And yet simplicity appeared to speak no more
Nor less to me than spoke the compound. At the core,
One and no other word, as in the crust of late,
Whispered, which, audible through the transition-state,
Was no loud utterance in even the ultimate

Disposure. For as some imperial chord subsists,
Steadily underlies the accidental mists
Of music springing thence, that run their mazy race
Around, and sink, absorbed, back to the triad base, —
So, out of that one word, each variant rose and fell
And left the same "All's change, but permanence as well."
— Grave note whence — list aloft! — harmonics sound, that mean:
"Truth inside, and outside, truth also; and between
Each, falsehood that is change, as truth is permanence.
The individual soul works through the shows of sense
(Which, ever proving false, still promise to be true)
Up to an outer soul as individual too;
And, through the fleeting, lives to die into the fixed,
And reach at length 'God, man, or both together mixed,'
Transparent through the flesh, by parts which prove a whole,
By hints which make the soul discernible by soul —
Let only soul look up, not down, not hate but love,
As truth successively takes shape, one grade above
Its last presentment, tempts as it were truth indeed
Revealed this time; so tempts, till we attain to read
The signs aright, and learn, by failure, truth is forced
To manifest itself through falsehood; whence divorced
By the excepted eye, at the rare season, for
The happy moment, truth instructs us to abhor
The false, and prize the true, obtainable thereby.
Then do we understand the value of a lie;
Its purpose served, its truth once safe deposited,
Each lie, superfluous now, leaves, in the singer's stead,
The indubitable song; the historic personage
Put by, leaves prominent the impulse of his age;
Truth sets aside speech, act, time, place, indeed, but brings
Nakedly forward now the principle of things
Highest and least."

CXXV.

Wherewith change ends. What change to dread
When, disengaged at last from every veil, instead
Of type remains the truth? once — falsehood: but anon
Theosuton e broteion eper kekramenon,
Something as true as soul is true, though veils between
Prove false and fleet away. As I mean, did he mean,
The poet whose bird-phrase sits, singing in my ear
A mystery not unlike? What through the dark and drear
Brought comfort to the Titan? Emerging from the lymph,

"God, man, or mixture" proved only to be a nymph:
"From whom the clink on clink of metal" (money, judged
Abundant in my purse) "struck" (bumped at, till it budged)
"The modesty, her soul's habitual resident"
(Where late the sisterhood were lively in their tent)
"As out of wingèd car" (that caravan on wheels)
"Impulsively she rushed, no slippers to her heels,"
And "Fear not, friends we flock!" soft smiled the sea-Fifine—
Primitive of the veils (if he meant what I mean)
The poet's Titan learned to lift, ere "Three-formed Fate,'
Moirai Trimorphoi," stood unmasked the Ultimate.

CXXVI.

Enough o' the dream! You see how poetry turns prose.
Announcing wonder-work, I dwindle at the close
Down to mere commonplace old facts which everybody knows.
So dreaming disappoints! The fresh and strange at first,
Soon wears to trite and tame, nor warrants the outburst
Of heart with which we hail those heights, at very brink
Of heaven, whereto one least of lifts would lead, we think,
But wherefrom quick decline conducts our step, we find,
To homely earth, old facts familiar left behind.
Did not this monument, for instance, long ago
Say all it had to say, show all it had to show,
Nor promise to do duty more in dream?

CXXVII.

Awaking so,
What if we, homeward-bound, all peace and some fatigue,
Trudge, soberly complete our tramp of near a league,
Last little mile which makes the circuit just, Elvire?
We end where we began: that consequence is clear.
All peace and some fatigue, wherever we were nursed
To life, we bosom us on death, find last is first
And thenceforth final too.

CXXVIII.

"Why final? Why the more
Worth credence now than when such truth proved false before?"
Because a novel point impresses now: each lie
Redounded to the praise of man, was victory
Man's nature had both right to get, and might to gain,
And by no means implied submission to the reign
Of other quite as real a nature, that saw fit
To have its way with man, not man his way with it.
This time, acknowledgment and acquiescence quell

Their contrary in man; promotion proves as well
Defeat: and Truth, unlike the False with Truth's outside,
Neither plumes up his will nor puffs him out with pride.
I fancy, there must lurk some cogency i' the claim,
Man, such abatement made, submits to, all the same.
Soul finds no triumph, here, to register like Sense
With whom 't is ask and have, — the want, the evidence
That the thing wanted, soon or late, will be supplied.
This indeed plumes up will; this, sure, puffs out with pride,
When, reading records right, man's instincts still attest
Promotion comes to Sense because Sense likes it best;
For bodies sprouted legs, through a desire to run:
While hands, when fain to filch, got fingers one by one,
And nature, that 's ourself, accommodative brings
To bear that, tired of legs which walk, we now bud wings
Since of a mind to fly. Such savor in the nose
Of Sense, would stimulate Soul sweetly, I suppose,
Soul with its proper itch of instinct, prompting clear
To recognize soul's self soul's only master here
Alike from first to last. But if time's pressure, light's
Or rather dark's, approach, wrest thoroughly the rights
Of rule away, and bid the soul submissive bear
Another soul than it play master everywhere
In great and small, — this time, I fancy, none disputes
There 's something in the fact that such conclusion suits
Nowise the pride of man, nor yet chimes in with attributes
Conspicuous in the lord of nature. He receives
And not demands — not first likes faith and then believes.

CXXIX.

And as with the last essence, so with its first faint type.
Inconstancy means raw, 't is faith alone means ripe
I' the soul which runs its round: no matter how it range
From Helen to Fifine, Elvire bids back the change
To permanence. Here, too, love ends where love began.
Such ending looks like law, because the natural man
Inclines the other way, feels lordlier free than bound.
Poor pabulum for pride when the first love is found
Last also! and, so far from realizing gain,
Each step aside just proves divergency in vain.
The wanderer brings home no profit from his quest
Beyond the sad surmise that keeping house were best
Could life begin anew. His problem posed aright
Was — "From the given point evolve the infinite!"
Not — "Spend thyself in space, endeavoring to joint
Together, and so make infinite, point and point:

Fix into one Elvire a Fair-ful of Fifines!"
Fifine, the foam-flake, she: Elvire, the sea's self, means
Capacity at need to shower how many such!
And yet we left her calm profundity, to clutch
Foam-flutter, bell on bell, that, bursting at a touch,
Blistered us for our pains. But wise, we want no more
O' the fickle element. Enough of foam and roar!
Land-locked, we live and die henceforth: for here 's the villa door.

CXXX.

How pallidly you pause o' the threshold! Hardly night,
Which drapes you, ought to make real flesh and blood so white!
Touch me, and so appear alive to all intents!
Will the saint vanish from the sinner that repents?
Suppose you are a ghost! A memory, a hope,
A fear, a conscience! Quick! Give back the hand I grope
I' the dusk for!

CXXXI.

That is well. Our double horoscope
I cast, while you concur. Discard that simile
O' the fickle element! Elvire is land not sea —
The solid land, the safe. All these word-bubbles came
O' the sea, and bite like salt. The unlucky bath 's to blame.
This hand of yours on heart of mine, no more the bay
I beat, nor bask beneath the blue! In Pornic, say,
The Mayor shall catalogue me duly domiciled,
Contributable, good-companion of the guild
And mystery of marriage. I stickle for the town,
And not this tower apart; because, though, halfway down,
Its mullions wink o'erwebbed with bloomy greenness, yet
Who mounts to staircase top may tempt the parapet,
And sudden there 's the sea! No memories to arouse;
No fancies to delude! Our honest civic house
Of the earth be earthy too! — or graced perchance with shell
Made prize of long ago, picked haply where the swell
Menaced a little once — or seaweed-branch that yet
Dampens and softens, notes a freak of wind, a fret
Of wave: though, why on earth should sea-change mend or mar
The calm contemplative householders that we are?
So shall the seasons fleet, while our two selves abide:
E'en past astonishment how sunrise and springtide
Could tempt one forth to swim; the more if time appoints
That swimming grow a task for one's rheumatic joints.
Such honest civic house, behold, I constitute

Our villa! Be but flesh and blood, and smile to boot!
Enter for good and all! then fate bolt fast the door,
Shut you and me inside, never to wander more!

CXXXII.

Only, — you do not use to apprehend attack!
No doubt, the way I march, one idle arm, thrown slack
Behind me, leaves the open hand defenceless at the back,
Should an impertinent on tiptoe steal, and stuff
— Whatever can it be? A letter sure enough,
Pushed betwixt palm and glove! That largess of a franc?
Perhaps inconsciously, — to better help the blank
O' the nest, her tambourine, and, laying egg, persuade
A family to follow, the nest-egg that I laid
May have contained — but just to foil suspicious folk —
Between two silver whites a yellow double yolk!
Oh, threaten no farewell! five minutes shall suffice
To clear the matter up. I go, and in a trice
Return; five minutes past, expect me! If in vain —
Why, slip from flesh and blood, and play the ghost again!

EPILOGUE.

THE HOUSEHOLDER.

SAVAGE I was sitting in my house, late, lone:
  Dreary, weary with the long day's work:
Head of me, heart of me, stupid as a stone:
  Tongue-tied now, now blaspheming like a Turk;
When, in a moment, just a knock, call, cry,
  Half a pang and all a rapture, there again were we! —
"What, and is it really you again?" quoth I:
  "I again, what else did you expect?" quoth She.

"Never mind, hie away from this old house —
  Every crumbling brick embrowned with sin and shame!
Quick, in its corners ere certain shapes arouse!
  Let them — every devil of the night — lay claim,
Make and mend, or rap and rend, for me! Good-bye!
  God be their guard from disturbance at their glee,
Till, crash, comes down the carcass in a heap!" quoth I:
  "Nay, but there 's a decency required!" quoth She.

"Ah, but if you knew how time has dragged, days, nights!
  All the neighbor-talk with man and maid — such men!
All the fuss and trouble of street-sounds, window-sights:
  All the worry of flapping door and echoing roof; and then,
All the fancies . . . Who were they had leave, dared try
  Darker arts that almost struck despair in me?
If you knew but how I dwelt down here!" quoth I:
  "And was I so better off up there?" quoth She.

"Help and get it over! *Reunited to his wife*
  (How draw up the paper lets the parish-people know?)
Lies M or N, departed from this life,
  Day the this or that, month and year the so and so.
What i' the way of final flourish? Prose, verse? Try!
  Affliction sore long time he bore, or, what is it to be?
Till God did please to grant him ease. Do end!" quoth I:
  "I end with — Love is all, and Death is nought!" quoth She.

NOTES

The number of the page is given, followed immediately by the number of the line on the page. The word or passage which is interpreted is given in italics. All the passages on a page are put into one paragraph, but in case there is more than one the page number is not repeated and the number of the line is put in parenthesis. Where stanzas are numbered this numbering is sometimes used instead of that of the page.

2. CHRISTMAS-EVE. (13) *Lot . . . Gomorrah*, Genesis xix. 17, 30. (37) *pattens*, wooden shoes lifted above the wet earth by iron supports. (40) *lance in rest*, a coat of mail had a projection called the rest, against which the lance was set when going into battle.

3:4, *Penitent Thief*, Luke xxiii. 40. (12) *Gallio*, Acts xviii. 12–17. (15) *tallyho*, cry of the huntsman in urging on his hounds. (25) *Saint John's Candlestick*, Revelation i. 12, 20. (28) *Grand-Inquisitor*, probably refers to Torquemada, the first Inquisitor-General in Spain, who was urgent in ferreting out heresy. (30) *you are the men*, Job xii. 2. (31) *Seven Churches*, Revelation i. 20. (43) *vestiment*, vestment, from Latin *vestimentum;* Matthew xxii. 11.

4:9, *pentacle*, six-pointed star made by two equilateral triangles, had special significance in middle-age astrology. (10) *conventicle*, a term of contempt for gatherings of Nonconformists in England and Covenanters in Scotland, who remained outside the established churches in those countries. (12) *Christmas-Eve of 'Forty-nine;* as the dissenters did not keep Christmas-eve or Christmas-day, unless they came on a Sunday, and as the Christmas of 'forty-nine came on Monday, it is evident Browning did not attempt to follow realistic methods into such details. (34) *severance*, disconnected.

5:4, *dew of Hermon*, Psalm cxxxiii. 3.

6:22, *Pharaoh . . . Joseph*, Genesis xl. 16–19.

12:31, *cup of cold water*, Matthew x. 42.

13:7, *Dome of God*, dome of St. Peter's cathedral in Rome. (8) *angel's measuring-rod*, Revelation xxi. 15. (40) *Basilica*, first a king's palace, then a court of justice, and finally a cathedral.

14:7, *baldachin*, the canopy over the high altar, supported by pillars. (12) *Behemoth*, Job xl. 15. (13) *silver bell;* when the Host is elevated in the Mass a bell is rung, that is signal for the people to fall on their knees in adoration. (29) *I died*, Revelation i. 18.

15:42, *antique sovereign Intellect*, the philosophical spirit of classical culture, which was overthrown by the triumph of Christianity.

16:7, *scrawled . . . leaving Sallust incomplete;* literary works, such as the histories of Sallust, were obliterated by early Christians in order that they might use the manuscripts for their own compositions, which were often ignorant and of little value. (16) *Christian Art* was prone to depict the miraculous and ascetic rather than the truly beautiful. (18) *Terpander's bird*, nightingale, Terpander being

accounted the father of Greek music. (24) *Aphrodite*, goddess of love, the Greeks being addicted to portray the nude in their art.

19:5, *Göttingen*, seat of German university that has had large influence upon modern theology, in giving it a rationalistic tendency. (46) *hake*, bunch.

20:5, *surplice-question*, that of High Church interest in the forms and usages of the Anglican Church.

22:40, *when A got leave an Ox to be;* the Hebrew letter A was suggested by an ox's head and horns, and is the first letter in the word for ox, while the letter G means camel.

25:20, *levigable*, reducible to fine powder. (43) *Middle Verb*, its reflexive form.

26:1, *anapæsts in comic-trimeter*, the rare use of the foot of three syllables, with accent on last, in verse with only three feet. (2) *halt and maimed Iketides*, Æschylus' *The Suppliants*, which we have only in an imperfect form, parts of it having been lost. (5) *Titus or Philemon*, books in New Testament, which have been severely dealt with by Higher Critics. (13) *Heine before his fever;* this poet was much given to dissipation before his illness of 1848, but after that his "mattress-grave" gave him more serious thoughts. (18) *meticulous*, over cautious.

29:9, *raree-show*, peep-show.

30:15, *brecchia*, conglomerate of broken stone of various colors held together by cement.

31:3, *Bourbon bully's gloatings*, King Bomba, who was Ferdinand II. of Naples and Sicily, a bitter opponent of Italian unity and all tendencies towards liberalism.

34. EASTER-DAY. (1) *Plato cries he doth . . . geometrize*, as in Plutarch's *Symposiacs*, viii. 2, Diogenianas says that Plato asserts that "God always plays the geometer;" also in Plato's *Timæus* he describes the creation as a geometrizing process.

35:23, *Coleoptera*, the order of insects, like beetles, with a hard case as covering to the wings. (29) *Grignon*, famous snuff-box maker, who made one with the crest of Duke of Orleans, regent for Louis XV. (38) *Semitic guess*, reference to philological difficulties found in Hebrew and other Semitic languages, which require frequent hypotheses.

36:5, *Jonah's whale translatable*, reference to theories of modern critics, that explain the story of Jonah in some other than a literal manner. (18) *Orpheus;* the obscurity referred to is well described by Müller: "The Thracian singer, Orpheus, is unquestionably the darkest point in the entire history of the early Grecian poetry, on account of the scantiness of the accounts respecting him." (19) *Dionysius Zagrias*, connected with the worship of Demeter in the Eleusinian Mysteries, but his origin and exact nature of his worship are involved in much obscurity.

39:24, *leave St. Paul for Æschylus*, the certainty of St. Paul about immortality for the mere hope of Æschylus, as voiced by the Titan, Prometheus, in his *Prometheus Bound*, line 255.

41:6, *the Lucumons*, heads of ancient Etruscan families, who were both priests and kings, the word Lucumo meaning chief, which was borne by the elder Tarquin king, Lucumo Tarquinius Priscus. (7)

Fourier's scheme, that of living in phalansteries or great communal houses, devised by François Fourier, 1772–1837.

42:43, *cometh like a thief*, 2 Peter iii. 10.

43:9, *Queen Mab*, queen of fairies in English folklore, mentioned in *Romeo and Juliet*, i. 4, 52, and here used to indicate the final act that brings us from the dreams of earth into the fullness of eternal life.

45:33, *Tophet*, Isaiah xxx. 33.

46: 8, *great white throne*, Revelation xx. 11. (34) *Sodom*, Genesis xix. 28.

47:30, *flesh refine to nerve*, refers to evolutionary theory of the development of greater nerve capacity by the increase of nerve cells and fibres by means of enlarged activity.

48:19, *filthy shall be filthy still*, Revelation xxii. 11.

49: 14, *bee-bird*, humming-bird, buzzing of whose wings sounds like the buzz of a bee; *aloe-flower*, the night-blooming aloe, which dies at daybreak; these two are cited as among the wonders of Nature.

50:26, *Buonarroti*, Michael Angelo, 1475–1564, the greatest of modern artists, here cited as the highest expression of intellectual power and creativeness.

52:20, *dervish*, Mohammedan devotee or mendicant friar vowed to poverty, humility, and chastity, some members of which order whirl in a mystic dance until quite exhausted and pass into a trance state.

57. TRANSCENDENTALISM: A POEM IN TWELVE BOOKS. The author speaks to a young realistic poet, who is writing a poem in twelve books on transcendentalism, and advises him not to make his work too naked, in his attempt to describe life as it is. In reality men want images and melody in their poetry, not reason. As illustration the author introduces Boehme and John of Halberstadt, to prove how desirous men are for what appeals to the imagination. (22) *Boehme*, Jacob, born at Altseidenberg, near Görlitz, Prussia, in 1575, and died at Dresden, November 7, 1624. He was one of the most remarkable of mystics, a man of great originality, who wrote many books on the inner meanings of religion, and who in many ways resembled Swedenborg. His book called *Aurora* is perhaps the best known and most characteristic of his works. He saw hidden meanings in all nature, and the *Bible* he interpreted into an elaborate system of symbolism. (24) *plants could speak;* this incident is described in Martenson's *Jacob Boehme: His Life and Teaching*, the best book on the subject of this mystic, as follows: —

"Sitting one day in his room, his eye fell upon a burnished pewter dish, which reflected the sunshine with such marvelous splendor that he fell into an inward ecstasy, and it seemed to him as if he could now look into the principles and deepest foundations of things. He believed that it was only a fancy, and in order to banish it from his mind he went out upon the green. But here he remarked that he gazed into the very heart of things, the very herbs and grass, and that actual nature harmonized with what he had inwardly seen."

58:4, *Halberstadt*, Johann Semeca, known as Teutonicus, a canonist and ecclesiastical dignitary of Halberstadt, who wrote a commentary on the *Decretum Gratiani*. He was also a magician and astrologer, and caused flowers to appear in winter. The poet says he filled the room with roses by magic, a feat not uncommon during

the Middle Ages. In Thomas Heywood's *Hierarchy*, book iv., p. 253, another of his magical tricks is described: "Johannes Teutonicus, a canon of Halberstadt in Germany, after he had performed a number of prestigious feats almost incredible, was transported by the Devil in the likeness of a black horse, and was both seen and heard upon one and the same Christmas day to say mass in Halberstadt, in Mayntz, and in Cologne."

58. How it Strikes a Contemporary. This is the earliest of Browning's poems in which he interprets his poetical ideas or his conception of poetry as an art. He treats the same subject in *Transcendentalism*, *Memorabilia*, and *Popularity*, which were also published in *Men and Women*. Later, he returned to the same theme in the epilogue to *Dramatic Idyls*, the epilogue to *Pacchiarotto*, and in *At the Mermaid*. *The Two Poets of Croisic* is a quite thorough discussion of the functions of the poetic art. His introductory essay to the letters of Shelley interprets his own poetical ideas, and especially his desire to reconcile the objective and the subjective phases of the poetic art. (3) *Valladolid*, capital of the early kings of Castile.

60:9, *Titians*, pictures by Tiziano Vecellio, 1477–1576, warm in color and much given to the nude. (23) *Corregidor*, corrector, from *corregir*, to correct, hence Spanish name for a magistrate.

61. Artemis Prologizes. (2) *Here*, consort of Zeus, and represented in mythology as proud and reserved. (13) *Asclepios*, god of medicine. (19) *Aphrodite*, goddess of love. (22) *Phaidra*, wife of Theseus, and step-mother to Hippolytus. (23) *Theseus*, the mythological first king of united Attica.

63:2, *Artemis*, the goddess of hunting and wild life, chaste and reserved.

64. An Epistle containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician. This poem is based on the account of the raising of Lazarus in John xi. 1–46. Its characters and events are fictitious. (17) *snake-stone*, a stone or other substance used to charm away the poison of a snake-bite, but useless for the purpose. (28) *Vespasian;* this Roman general marched against Palestine in 66, and was succeeded by his son Titus when he became Emperor, in 70. (29) *black lynx*, Syrian lynx, which has black ears.

65:6, *tertians*, a fever recurring on the third day. (7) *falling-sickness*, epilepsy. (8) *there's a spider*, probably of the saltigrade species, that move by leaps. "One often sees this species and its congeners upon the ledges of rocks, the edges of tombstones, the walls of buildings, and like situations, hunting their prey, which they secure by jumping upon them, very much as a cat or tiger would do." The expression, "take five and drop them," probably refers to the use of the spider as a medicine by physicians. The spider was thought to have an occult healing power, if applied either internally or externally. Pliny describes its use; and until recently the spider has been so employed. See *Poet-Lore*, i. 518. (18) *gum-tragacanth*, from leguminous shrub, *Astragalus tragacantha*. (23) *Zoar*, Genesis xiv. 2.

68:4, *Greek fire*, described by Gibbon in the fifty-second chapter of his *Decline and Fall*, who says that "the principal ingredient was

the naptha, or liquid bitumen, a light, tenacious, inflammable oil, which springs from the earth, and catches fire as soon as it comes in contact with the air."

70:17, *blue-flowering borage*, called by the ancients one of the four "cordial flowers," for cheering the spirits, the others being the rose violet, and alkanet. Pliny describes it as producing exhilarating effects.

71. JOHANNES AGRICOLA IN MEDITATION. Johannes Agricola (originally Schnitter or Schneider), 1492–1566, was Luther's secretary at the Leipsic council of 1519, a teacher and preacher, a professor at Wittenberg, court preacher at Berlin, and superintendent of churches in Brandenburg. According to Köstlin, he taught that "the proclamation of God's law was no necessary part of Christianity, as such, nor of the way of salvation prepared and revealed by Christ. He sought to give full effect to the fundamental evangelical doctrine, that the grace of God alone had power to save through the joyful message of Christ." On the first publication of this poem, after the title, appeared the following: "'Antinomians, so denominated for rejecting the Law as a thing of no use under the Gospel dispensation: they say, that good works do not further nor evil works hinder salvation; that the child of God cannot sin, that God never chastiseth him, that murder, drunkenness, etc., are sins in the wicked but not in him, that the child of grace being once assured of salvation, afterwards never doubteth, . . . that God doth not love any man for his holiness, that sanctification is no evidence of justification, etc. Pontanus, in his *Catalogue of Heresies*, says John Agricola was the author of this sect, A. D. 1535.' *Dictionary of all Religions*, 1704."

73. PICTOR IGNOTUS. (14) *old streets named afresh from the event;* Vasari reports that the Borgo Allegri in Florence was so named from the joy of the inhabitants when a Madonna by Cimabue was carried through it in procession.

74: 3, *travertine*, white limestone, the name being a corruption of Tiburtinus, from Tibur, now Tivoli, near Rome, where this stone is secured.

74. FRA LIPPO LIPPI. Filippo Lippi was born at Florence, in 1406. He studied art under Tommasaccio, who is usually known as Masaccio, and who is called in the poem "hulking Tom." His poverty in childhood carried him into a convent, but he was by nature wholly unfitted for that kind of life. He escaped from it, led a free and easy life of travel and adventure, and finally settled in Florence under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici. He was a realist in art, painting life as he saw it about him, and even sacred subjects he treated in the same manner. He was bold, fervid, naïve, full of delight in the natural, and not inclined to refine or idealize. The coarseness of his life, as contrasted with the beauty of his artistic work, is the subject of the poem. (7) *Carmine*, monastery of the Del Carmine monks. (17) *Cosimo of the Medici*, the statesman and art patron of Florence, 1389–1464. (23) *pilchards*, a kind of fish. (34) *John Baptist's head*, imaginary picture.

75:19, *flower o' the broom*, a song modeled after an Italian stornello, which is sung responsively by the peasants, the first line being

sung by one person, and another follows with the last two in the three-line verse. (33) *Saint Laurence*, church of San Lorenzo, containing tombs of the Medici, and several great sculptures by Michael Angelo.

76: 8, *Aunt Lapaccia;* Vasari says: "The child was for some time under the care of a certain Mona Lapaccia, his aunt, the sister of his father, who brought him up with very great difficulty till he had attained his eighth year, when, being no longer able to support the burden of his maintenance, she placed him in the convent of the Carmelites." (28) *Latin in pure waste;* "in proportion as he showed himself dexterous and ingenious in all works performed by hand, did he manifest the utmost dulness and incapacity in letters, to which he would never apply himself, nor would he take any pleasure in learning of any kind." (41) *the Eight*, the chief magistrates.

77: 4, *scrawled, within antiphonary's marge*, the music-book of the Church, containing antiphones, responses, etc., compiled by Gregory the Great. (5) *joined legs and arms to the long music-notes;* the notes at this time were square and oblong, very different from those of present time. (13) *Camaldolese*, monks of the convent of Camaldoli. (14) *Preaching Friars*, Dominicans.

78: 17, *Giotto*, painter, sculptor, and architect, 1266–1337, the great reviver of art in Italy.

79: 7, *kiss the girls*, a tendency which may explain the fact that when he was fifty years old, and had been made the chaplain of the monastery of Santa Margherita, "he one day chanced to see the daughter of Francesco Buti, a citizen of Florence, who had been sent to the convent, either as a novice or boarder. Fra Filippo having given a glance at Lucrezia, for such was the name of the girl, who was exceedingly beautiful and graceful, so persuaded the nuns, that he prevailed on them to permit him to make a likeness of her for the figure of the Virgin in the work he was executing for them. The result of this was that the painter fell violently in love with Lucrezia, and at length found means to influence her in such a manner, that he led her away from the nuns, and on a certain day, when she had gone forth to do honor to the Cintola of our Lady. By this event the nuns were deeply disgraced, and the father of Lucrezia was so grievously afflicted thereat, that he nevermore recovered his cheerfulness, and made every possible effort to regain his child. But Lucrezia, whether retained by fear or by some other cause, would not return, but remained with Filippo, to whom she bore a son, who was also called Filippo, and who eventually became a most excellent and very famous painter like his father." (17) *Brother Angelico*, Giovanni de Fiesole, 1387–1455, usually known as Fra Angelico, the most famous of the ascetic painters, who worked on his knees. (18) *Brother Lorenzo*, Lorenzo Monaco, of same school with Angelico.

80: 13, *Guidi*, Tommaso Guidi, called Tommasaccio or Hulking Tom, whom Browning makes a pupil of Lippo, but it is now proven that he was his teacher.

81: 15, *a Saint Laurence at Prato*, who suffered martyrdom in the time of Valerian, A. D. 258, by being broiled to death on a gridiron. (38) *Sant' Ambrogio*, church of Saint Ambrose, in which Lippi painted a picture of the Virgin crowned, with angels and saints, said by Browning to have been done as an expiation for his sensualities.

82:1, *Saint John*, the Baptist, again referred to in line 22. (2) *Saint Ambrose*, archbishop of Milan, 340–397, the great organizer of the early Church in Italy. (23) *Iste perfecit opus*, this one completed the work. (27) *hot cockles*, an old-fashioned game.

83. ANDREA DEL SARTO: CALLED "THE FAULTLESS PAINTER." This poem was written because John Kenyon, Mrs. Browning's cousin, asked Browning to secure for him a copy of the picture of Andrea and his wife in the Pitti Palace. Not being able to procure one, he wrote the poem to describe it instead. This Florentine painter, 1486–1531, was called del Sarto because his father was a tailor, the name meaning in English "Andrew the tailor." He was also called *Andrea senza errori*, Andrew the unerring; likewise *il pittore senza errori*, the faultless painter. He acquired these names because of his rapid and facile skill as a painter, and his correctness of style. He was lacking in ideality and elevation of thought; but he had a true pictorial style, a very high standard of workmanship, and an enviable balance of executive endowments. He had almost everything necessary to the making of a great painter except inspiration and a deep consecration to a noble purpose. (2) *Lucrezia*, di Baccio del Fede, wife of a cap-maker, with whom Andrea fell in love; shortly the husband died, and Andrea married her in much haste. She was very beautiful but artful. Vasari says that "all who knew the facts mourned over him, and he soon began to be as much avoided as he had been previously sought after. His disciples still remained with him, it is true, in the hope of learning something useful, yet there was not one of them, great or small, who was not maltreated by his wife, both by evil words and despiteful actions; none could escape her blows, but although Andrea lived in the midst of all that torment, he yet accounted it a high pleasure." (15) *Fiesole*, city on the Arno three miles west of Florence.

85:6, *Morello*, highest of the Apennines. (18) *Urbinate*, Raphael, because born in Urbino, 1483–1520. (19) *George Vasari*, a painter, and author of *Lives of the Most Excellent Italian Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, from whom Browning took almost literally the facts for the poem. (43) *Agnolo*, Michael Agnolo Buonarotti, the famous painter, sculptor, and architect, 1475–1564. (44) *Rafael*, the great painter, Raphael Sanzio, 1483–1520.

86:16, *Francis*, the first King of France of that name, 1494–1547, who, in 1518, invited Andrea to his court at Fontainebleau, where he was much praised and honored. He set to work, but in a few months his wife wrote him complaining bitterly of his absence. He obtained permission to visit her, and a considerable sum of money was entrusted to him by Francis with which to buy pictures and statues. He swore upon the Gospels to return in a few months, but he lavished the money on the family of his wife, built a house, and neglected his own father and mother, who died in abject poverty. He did not return to France or refund the money.

87:5, *said Agnolo to Rafael*, the remark was, as given by Bocchi in his *Bellezze di Firenze:* "There is a bit of a manikin in Florence who, if he chanced to be employed in great undertakings as you have happened to be, would compel you to look well about you."

(31) *cue-owls*, so called from their cry, which the Italians say is *chiù* or *ciù*.

88:16, *scudi*, Italian coins worth about one dollar each. (36) *New Jerusalem*, Revelation xxi. 15. (38) *Leonard*, Leonardo da Vinci, 1452–1519, sculptor and architect, who is made by the poet, in connection with Rafael and Agnolo, to represent the revival of natural life in the Renaissance.

89. The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church. St. Praxedis or Praxedes was an early Christian saint, who lived about the time of Antoninus Pius. Praxedes and Pudentiana were daughters of Pudens, a Roman senator, the friend of St. Paul, mentioned in 2 Timothy iv. 21. They spent their lives in works of charity and in giving aid to the persecuted Christians. See an account of them in Mrs. Jameson's *Sacred and Legendary Art*. The house of Pudens is said to have been used by St. Peter as a place of worship. Churches were early built to the memory of both these good women, that to St. Praxedes on the spot where the house of Pudens was located. In 499 an oratory was built over her grave in Rome by Pius I. This building having been destroyed in 822, the present church was built by Paschal I. The church is very richly ornamented with beautiful stone-work, and one of its chapels is called Orto del Paradiso, or the Garden of Paradise. The bishop of the poem is a purely imaginary character, but he is such a person as fits the surroundings into which he is placed. (3) *nephews;* in reality sons are meant, this euphemism being employed because a bishop could not marry. (21) *epistle side*, righthand side of altar, from which the epistle is read by the priest highest in authority, the gospel being read from the opposite side by a priest lower in rank. (25) *basalt*, trap rock of a black, bluish, or leaden-gray color. (28) *Anselm*, his favorite son, then standing at the foot of his bed. (31) *onion-stone*, translation of *cipolin*, Italian *cipollino*, a little onion, from *cipolla*, onion, so called because made up of different strata, a greenish marble, streaked with white or greenish zones.

90:1, *olive-frail*, a basket made of rushes used for packing olives. (2) *lapis lazuli*, a blue stone used for ornamental work. (6) *Frascati*, favorite resort, twelve miles from Rome, on Alban hills. (8) *God the Father's globe*, a group of the Trinity by Bernardino Ludovisi, over the altar of St. Ignatius in the great Jesuit church. (11) *swift as a weaver's shuttle*, Job vii. 6. (14) *antique-black* = Nero-antico, a kind of stone. (17) *tripod*, three-footed stool on which the priestess of Apollo sat to prophesy, used as symbol of Delphic wisdom ; *thyrsus*, staff coiled about with ivy or spear with pine-cone stuck upon it, used as symbol of Bacchic inspiration. These and other pagan symbols are curiously mixed with Christian symbols and pictures, as was characteristic of the Renaissance. The dying priest even mistakes the picture of St. Praxed for that of Christ. (25) *travertine*, a white, hard, semi-crystalline limestone, deposited from the waters of springs or streams. (26) *jasper*, that called bloodstone, a deep green stone with blood-red spots. (31) *pistachio-nut*, green almond. (37) *Tully*, Marcus Tullius Cicero, 106–46 B. C. (39) *Ulpian*, jurist and code maker, 170–228. (40) *see God made and eaten*, in the transubstantiation of the elements in the Mass.

91: 1, *crook*, bishop's crozier. (3) *mortcloth*, pall or funeral covering. (13) *elucescebat*, he was illustrious, wrongly formed from *eluceo, eluxi, elucere*, to be illustrious. (16) *Else I give the Pope my villas!* a satirical reference to the habit followed by Julius II. and other popes, of making themselves the heirs of the clergy and cardinals. (22) *visor*, mask; *Term*, the image put up at the terminus or boundary of estates in Rome. (25) *entablature*, the frieze and the horizontal mouldings above and below it. (30) *gritstone*, coarse-grained variety of sandstone.

92. Bishop Blougram's Apology. The speaker is a Catholic bishop, sixty years of age; and he is addressing Gigadibs, a literary man of thirty. The poem is not historical; but it is understood that Browning had in mind Cardinal Wiseman when he was giving the bishop his being and character. Wiseman was in his day a famous ecclesiastic in England, an archbishop and cardinal, and the author of several important theological works, 1802–1865. Browning wrote to a friend: "The most curious notice I ever had was from Cardinal Wiseman on *Blougram* — i. e. himself. It was in the *Rambler*, a Catholic journal of those days, and certified to be his by Father Prout, who said nobody else would have dared put it in." The article praises the poem for its "fertility of illustration and felicity of argument," and adds that "though utterly mistaken in the very groundwork of religion, though starting from the most unworthy notions of the work of a Catholic bishop, and defending a self-indulgence every honest man must feel to be disgraceful, is yet in its way triumphant." (3) *Pugin*, English architect, 1810–1852, who turned Catholic and designed many cathedrals. (31) *Corpus Christi Day*, Thursday after Trinity Sunday, when feast of Sacrament of the Altar is celebrated. (42) *che*, what.

93: 6, *Count D'Orsay*, a clever man of fashion in France, 1798–1852.

94: 21, *Parma's pride, the Jerome*, a picture of St. Jerome by Correggio, in the Ducal Academy at Parma.

96: 6, *chorus-ending from Euripides*, indicates the formula used by Euripides in closing his choruses, something like this: "The gods perform many things contrary to our expectations, and those things which we looked for are not accomplished; but God has brought to pass things unthought of."

99: 7, *Peter's creed, or rather, Hildebrand's*, refers to great effort of Hildebrand, who became Pope Gregory VII., 1073–1085, to establish the temporal power of the papacy and to make it universal.

100: 29, *Verdi . . . Rossini;* when a very poor opera by Verdi was first presented it was vigorously applauded, but the author looked at Rossini and read in his face the true verdict.

101: 15, *Schelling's way*, refers to the way of this German philosopher, 1775–1854, in explaining Christian dogmas into something quite different from what they commonly signify, as when he says the Trinity means the reconciliation of the finite and infinite, and that the incarnation is a universal fact of the spirit.

102: 33, *Austrian marriage*, that of Marie Louise, daughter of the Emperor of Austria, to Napoleon I. (36) *Austerlitz*, battle fought by Napoleon in 1805 against the combined armies of Russia, Austria,

and England, resulting in his success and a closer union of these nations to oppose him.

103:29, *trimmest house in Stratford*, Sir Hugh Clopton's mansion at the centre of the town, for two centuries known as the "great house," bought by Shakespeare in 1597. (31) *Giulio Romano*, an Italian painter, 1492–1546, referred to in *Winter's Tale*, v. ii. 105; *Dowland*, English musician, praised in a sonnet of *The Passionate Pilgrim*, attributed to Shakespeare, for his lute-playing. (34) *Pandulp;* this quotation is from *King John*, iii. 1, 138.

105:2, *Strauss*, David Friedrich, 1808–1874, author of a *Life of Jesus* in the spirit of the "way" of Schelling above referred to.

106:44, *ichors*, the serum which exudes when the skin is broken and begins the process of healing.

107:3, *snake 'neath Michael's foot*, picture of St. Michael by Raphael, in the Louvre. (39) *Newman*, John Henry, leader of tractarian movement in Church of England, who joined the Roman Church in 1845. (40) *Immaculate Conception;* this doctrine was made an article of faith of the Roman Church in 1854, the denial of which is accounted heresy.

108:7, *King Bomba*, Ferdinand II., King of the two Sicilies, who was satirically given this name and that of King Puffcheek and King Liar; *lazzaroni*, beggars of Naples, so called from the Lazarus of the parable in Luke xvi. 20. (8) *Antonelli*, Cardinal, secretary of Pius IX., an astute politician and devout churchman. (20) *Naples' liquefaction*, the miracle of the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius, of which a small quantity in a solid state is preserved in a crystal reliquary contained in the great church in Naples. When brought into the presence of the head of the saint it melts, bubbles up, and when moved flows on one side. "Mr. Browning is quite wrong in suggesting that belief in this or any other of this class of miracles is obligatory on the Catholic conscience. A man may be a good Catholic and believe none of them." — Dr. Berdoe. (24) *decrassify*, make less crass or gross. (36) *Fichte*, a German philosopher, 1762–1814, who defined God as the "moral order of the universe."

111:37, *Pastor est tui Dominus*, the Lord is thy shepherd.

113:22, *Whitechapel*, a district in London, noted for its poverty and crimes. (44) *in partibus Episcopus*, etc., refers to the custom that, "in countries where the Roman Catholic faith is not regularly established, as it was not in England before the time of Cardinal Wiseman, there were no bishops of sees in the kingdom itself, but they took their titles from heathen lands."

115. Cleon. The motto is from Acts xvii. 28, and the words quoted by Paul are from the *Phœnomena* of Aratus, a Greek poet of Tarsus. The characters are imaginary, but the poem is historical in its spirit. Both Cleon and Protus are typical of the period they represent. (1) *sprinkled isles*, probably the Sporades.

116:12, *phare*, light-house. (14) *Pœcile*, the portico containing pictures by Polygnotus of battle scenes, at Athens. (21) *combined the moods;* the scales in Greek music were called moods or modes, and were subject to much variation in the arrangement of tones and semitones. (44) *rhomb . . . lozenge . . . trapezoid*, four-sided forms

which differ from each other with reference to the parallel arrangement of their sides and the obliquity of their angles.

118:2, *drupe*, general name for fruits like cherry, peach, and plum. (10) *Terpander*, musician of Lesbos who invented the four-stringed Greek lyre. (11) *Phidias*, Athenian sculptor; *his friend*, Pericles.

123. RUDEL TO THE LADY OF TRIPOLI. This Provençal troubadour of the twelfth century was a native of Provence, and was a follower of Count Geoffrey, brother of Richard the Lion-hearted. The crusaders brought glowing accounts of the beauty of the Countess of Tripoli, a small duchy lying on the Mediterranean to the north of Palestine. The account of her in the *Lives of the Troubadours*, as translated by Ida Farnell, is as follows: "Now Jaufre Rudel of Blaia was a right noble prince of Blaia, and it chanced that, though he had not seen, he loved the Countess of Tripoli for her great excellency and virtue, whereof the pilgrims who came from Antioch spread abroad the report. And he made of her fair songs, with fair melodies, and with short verses, till he longed so greatly to see her, that he took the Cross and embarked upon the sea to gain sight of her. There fell upon him great sickness, and the thing was made known to the Countess, so that she came to his bedside, and took him into her arms. Then he knew that it was she, and sight and speech returned unto him, and he gave praise and thanks unto God who had preserved his life until his seeing her. And so he died in the arms of the Countess, and she gave him honorable burial."

124. ONE WORD MORE. The concluding poem in *Men and Women*, and was addressed to Mrs. Browning. The reference in the first two lines was to the fifty poems contained in this book as first published, in 1855. (5) *century of sonnets;* only four were written by Raphael, so far as is now known. Guido Reni purchased in Rome a book of Raphael's containing a hundred designs drawn by his hand, and this book Reni left to his heir, Signorini. Is it possible that Browning has substituted *sonnets* for *drawings*, in order to make his allusion more in harmony with his general purpose? (10) *Who that one, you ask?* in his youth in Rome, Raphael fell in love with a girl called Margarita, of whom he made two pictures, and to whom he addressed three sonnets. (21) *Madonnas*, of which Raphael was one of the greatest painters, the most celebrated being the Sistine, in the Dresden gallery; Foligno, in the Vatican; Granduca, in Florence; and the one in the Louvre, called La Belle Jardinière.

125:3. *Dante once prepared to paint an angel*, an indication of Dante's artistic tastes. Lionardo Aretino said: "Dante was an excellent draughtsman." Giotto was his intimate friend; and it is said that Dante suggested many of the finest of Giotto's pictures. Giotto tried to do in art what Dante did in poetry, — open it to the understanding of the people. Dante undoubtedly shared in the artistic spirit of his time, and was fully capable of appreciating it. On this point of Dante's interest in painting we have the testimony of Boccaccio, in his biography of the poet. "He loved passionately the fine arts," wrote Boccaccio, "even those which — like painting — were not immediately connected with poetry. In his youth he had taken lessons of Cimabue, the last and the most celebrated of the

painters who composed in what is called the Greek manner; he was afterwards very intimate with Giotto, the successor of Cimabue, whom he eclipsed, and the real creator of modern painting. Dante had intimate relations with the celebrated singers and musicians of his time; being gifted with a fine voice, he sang agreeably, and with much enthusiasm; it was his favorite way of expressing the emotions of his soul, more especially when they were of a gentle and happy nature." The reference in the poem is to the thirty-fifth section of Dante's *La Vita Nuova*, which was written on the first anniversary of the death of Beatrice, June 9, 1291. As translated by Prof. C. E. Norton, Dante said of his effort to paint a picture: "On that day on which the year was complete since this lady was made one of the denizens of life eternal, I was seated in a place where, having her in mind, I was drawing an angel upon certain tablets. And while I was drawing it, I turned mine eyes and saw at my side men to whom it was meet to do honor. They were looking on what I did, and, as was afterwards told me, they had been there already some time before I became aware of it. When I saw them I rose, and, saluting them, said, 'Another was just now with me, and on that account I was in thought.' And when they had gone away, I returned unto my work, namely, that of drawing figures of angels; and while doing this a thought came to me of saying words in rhyme, as if for an anniversary poem of her, and of addressing those persons who had come to me." "Men to whom it was meet to do honor" Browning translates as "certain people of importance." It does not appear from the *Vita Nuova* that these men of importance had any design against Dante, as Browning seems to indicate. (6) *a pen corroded*, refers to the manner in which Dante punishes in his great poem those who were his personal enemies. (10) *live man's flesh for parchment*, refers to no special incident in the life of Dante, or anything mentioned in the *Commedia*.

126:7, *smites the rock*, Exodus xvii. 1, and numbers xx. 2. The smiting of the rock by Moses in order to secure water is compared to the experiences of the artist with a thankless world. (30) *Sinai . . . brilliance*, Exodus xix. 9, 16; xxxiv. 30. (34) *Jethro's daughter*, Zipporah, the wife of Moses, Exodus ii. 16, 21. (35) *Æthiopian bond-slave*, Numbers xii. 1.

127:14, *liberal hand*, the illustration of a Prayer-book by one who is capable of the greatest work in fresco. (28) *Karshish*, etc., names of characters in the fifty poems that made up the *Men and Women* volume as originally published.

128:4, *Samminiato*, the church of San Miniato in Florence. (15) *turn a new side*, the one not now turned towards the earth. (17) *Zoroaster*, referred to as the worshipper of light. (18) *Galileo*, as inventor of telescope, brought the moon more distinctly into view. (19) *dumb to Homer*, Homer describes the moon in the *Hymn to Artemis* (though he surely did not write it); *dumb to Keats*, who sings of the love of the moon for a mortal, in his *Endymion*. (28) *Moses, etc.*, Exodus xxiv. 1, 10.

134. In a Balcony. (12) *Rubens*, the greatest of the Flemish painters, 1577–1640.

143:13, *queen loved a poet humpbacked*, perhaps refers to Françoise

d'Aubigné, who married the poet Scarron, and who afterwards became the wife and in all but formal authority the queen of Louis XIV.

165. GOLD HAIR. A STORY OF PORNIC. According to Mrs. Orr, this is "a true story of Pornic, which may be read in guide-books to the place. A young girl of good family died there in odor of sanctity; she seemed too pure and fragile for earth. But she had one earthly charm, that of glorious golden hair; and one earthly feeling, which was her apparent pride in it. As she lay on her deathbed, she entreated that it might not be disturbed; and she was buried near the high altar of the church of St. Gilles, a picturesque old church which has since been destroyed, with the golden tresses closely swathed about her. Years afterwards, the church needed repair. A loose coin drew attention to the spot in which the coffin lay. Its boards had burst, and scattered about lay thirty double louis, which had been hidden in the golden hair. So the saint-like maiden was a miser.

Concerning the church of this poem Browning wrote to a friend, in September, 1865: "I suppose my 'poem,' which you say brings me and Pornic together in your mind, is the one about the poor girl, — if so, 'fancy' (as I hear you say); they have pulled down the church since I arrived last month; there are only the shell-like, roofless walls left, for a few weeks more; it was very old, — built on a natural base of rock, — small enough, to be sure, — so they built a smart new one behind it, and down goes this; just as if they could not have pitched down their brick and stucco farther away, and left the old place for the fishermen — so here — the church is even more picturesque — and certain old Norman ornaments, capitals of pillars and the like, which we left erect in the doorway, are at this moment in a heap of rubbish by the roadside."

iv. 1, *flix*, like flax.

xviii. 1, *O cor humanum, pectora coeca*, O heart of man, blind breast, probably intended for the words in Lucretius ii. 14, — "O miseras hominum mentes, O pectora caeca," O wretched mind of man, O blind breast! (5) *Louis-d'or*, French gold coin worth $4.60.

xxvi. 3, *thirty pieces*, Matthew xxvii. 3, 5–7.

xxix. 3, *Essays-and-Reviews' debate*, a warm discussion in England caused by the publication of a volume of *Essays and Reviews*, in 1860, contributed to by Professor Benjamin Jowett, Dr. Temple of Rugby, and five other prominent Church of England men. It was very liberal on theological questions, representing the Broad-church spirit, and it took radical ground for that day on problems of Higher Criticism. (5) *Colenso*, the bishop of Natal, who wrote works on the Pentateuch of a very radical kind, that fanned the flame started by the *Essays and Reviews*.

173. DÎS ALITER VISUM; OR, LE BYRON DE NOS JOURS. The first part of the title is from Virgil, *Æneid*, ii. 579, "The gods see otherwise." The second part means "The Byron of our days," or the modern Byron, a suggestion that one may awaken love but not be excited by it one's self.

Dr. Daniel G. Brinton thinks this poem is as dainty and delicate as any *vers de société*, and adds of the seventh verse: "I think when

Browning wrote that he must have had in mind the passage from Jean Paul Richter which Alfred Musset places for motto to that blood-curdling piece of his called *Suzon*. 'Happy is he,' says Jean Paul, 'whose heart asks not save a heart, and who desires neither an English park, nor an opera seria, nor the music of Mozart, nor a picture by Raphael, nor an eclipse of the moon, nor even light of moon, and neither scenes from a romance, nor yet their fulfilment!"

viii. 1, *Schumann*, composer and critic of music, 1810–1856. (3) *Ingres*, painter, 1780–1867. (5) *Heine*, lyrical poet, 1800–1856.

ix. 2, *votive frigate*, model of a vessel hung up in the church as a sort of thank-offering for safe return from a voyage.

xii. 3, *Fortieth spare Arm-chair*, certainty of being elected a member of the French Academy.

180. Too Late. (24) *tekel*, Daniel v. 27.

181: 30, *summum jus*, perfect justice.
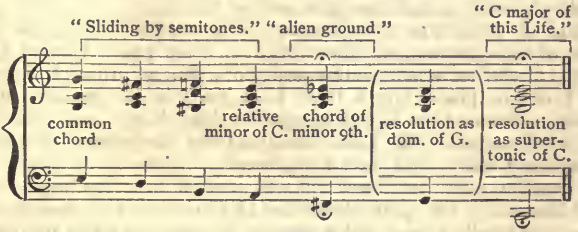
182. Abt Vogler. George Joseph Vogler, 1749–1814, was a Catholic priest, hence abt or abbé. He early took an interest in music, but was ordained a priest at Rome, in 1773. He opened a music school at Mannheim in 1775, and another at Stockholm in 1786. He invented a new system of fingering for the harpsichord, a new method of building the organ by introducing free reeds and unisonous stops, and a new instrument called the Orchestrion, on which he played with great success. He played on this instrument in many parts of Europe and created much enthusiasm. In 1807 he became the kapellmeister of the Grand Duke of Hesse-Darmstadt and opened his third music school, among his pupils being Weber and Meyerbeer. He died at Darmstadt in May, 1814. He wrote on musical method, and he secured a high position as a teacher and composer. His *Missa Pastoricia* is performed every Christmas at the Hofkapelle, Vienna. Herr Richter reports that he has heard this mass more than once, and he describes it as a remarkably fine composition, with beautiful effects for oboes and horns. (3) *Solomon willed*, the legends of Jews and Moslim give Solomon power over supernatural beings, owing it to the seal he wore, on which "the most great name of God was engraved." (7) *ineffable Name*, that of God, which the Jews thought was so holy that it must not be uttered. (23) *Rome's dome*, that of St. Peter's in Rome, which is illuminated on Easter Sunday and at other festivals.

183: 10, *Protoplast*, the original of creation, that served as a pattern for succeeding objects.

184: 3, *out of three sounds . . . a star*, three colors make a new and distinct color, but three sounds do not make a new sound, but result in their harmonization, each retaining its individuality, but joining with the others to create a chord.

185: 11, *common chord*, consists of a fundamental tone with its (major or minor) third and its perfect fifth. (13) *ninth*, "if major," according to the editors of *Poet-Lore*, "contains an octave and two semitones; if minor, an octave and one semitone. These last lines of the poem, stripped of their symbolic meaning, may be taken as an exact explanation of a simple harmonic modulation. Suppose Abt Vogler, when he 'feels for the common chord,' to have struck the chord of C major in its first inversion, i. e. the third, E, in the

bass, the fifth, G, at the top; now, 'sliding by semitones,' that is, playing in succession chords with the upper note a semitone lower, he would come to the chord A, E, C, which is the (minor) tonic chord of the scale of A, the relative minor of C, and so he would thus '*sink* to the minor.' Now he blunts the fifth of this chord E to E♭, which thus becomes a minor ninth over the root D, the whole chord being D, F♯, A, C, E♭, and, as he explains, he stands on alien ground because he has modulated away from the key of C, but, instead of following this dominant by its natural solution, its own tonic, which would be G, B, D, he treats it as if it were what is called a supertonic harmony. So, after pausing on this chord to survey awhile the heights he rolled from into the deep, he suddenly modulates back to C. He has dared and done, his resting-place is found, — the C major of this life. This is the progression: —



185. Rabbi Ben Ezra. This Jewish teacher and author was sometimes known as Ibn Ezra or Abenare, 1092–1168. Born of poor parents, he studied hard in his native city of Toledo and rose to distinction as a scholar. He travelled widely in Europe and Asia, spent several years in Italy, visited England, then lived in the south of France, and was loved and honored by his people. He was a prolific writer on Hebrew grammar, the *Talmud*, and produced several volumes of commentaries on the Scriptures. He was a follower of Plato, the Neo-Platonists, and the Arabian thinkers.

189:2, *knowledge absolute*, is indicative of the theories held by the Rabbi, which on this point have been stated as follows: "So long as the mind is on its road to perfection, gathering more and more knowledge, subject and object are not identical; but when it arrives at the highest degree of perfection, it has acquired that truth which includes all elements of human knowledge. The soul is then like God, who, in perceiving anything, is the subject which perceives, the object perceived, and the perception itself. When the mental faculties of man reach this degree of perfection, they are no longer a quality or action of the soul, they are the soul itself, in a new form; they are like an angel, 'cleaving unto the Most High,' and participate, to some extent at least, in his divine power. . . . In the same way the soul which has acquired a true knowledge of the Eternal is believed to share in his eternity, and to receive the reward which no eye except that of the Eternal ever saw, but which 'he will bestow on those who wait on him.'"

190:1, *Potter's wheel*, Isaiah lxiv. 8, Jeremiah xviii. 2–6. (13) *He*

fixed thee, a reference to Ibn Ezra's theory that "the soul descends from heaven as a *tabula rasa*, a blank, which is to be filled up with the knowledge gathered here on earth during a sojourn in the body." (18) *try thee and turn thee forth*, the doctrine held by Ibn Ezra was that "the power of determining the future of the soul is entirely in the will of man. It must therefore be man's primary duty to do everything by which his will may be influenced in favor of his heavenly soul. . . . The knowledge of God cannot be attained by direct means; it can only indirectly be approached by the study of his works in the universe, and especially in man, the microcosm. By knowing ourselves, by considering how the invisible, incorporeal, immortal soul fills and governs the whole visible, mutable body, we are by analogy enabled to conceive the idea of an invisible, eternal Being, who fills and governs the whole universe. The investigation of the origin, nature, and aim of the soul is therefore indispensable to all who wish to find the right path of life."

191. A Death in the Desert. This poem is not historical, but some of the early legends about St. John were probably used by the poet. Cerinthus was a contemporary of John, according to Irenæus; but Eusebius places him a little later, early in the second century. He was educated in Egypt, taught in Asia Minor, and maintained Gnostic doctrines. He held that Jesus was the natural offspring of Joseph and Mary, that the Christ became incarnated in Jesus after his baptism, and that the world was created by a demiurge, not by God himself. The poet attributes to Cerinthus the doctrine that Jesus was wholly human in his nature; but this was by no means what he actually taught. (1) *Pamphylax*, fictitious, as are also Xanthus, Valeus, and Theotypas. (6) *terebinth*, turpentine tree. (23) *decree*, it is impossible to say what one of the early persecutions of the Christians is here referred to by the poet.

192:22, *nard*, an unguent of spikenard, odorous and highly aromatic and restorative.

193:34, *glossa*, commentary.

197:31, *Prometheus*, who stole fire from Olympus and gave it to men, in opposition to Zeus.

198:35, *Ebion*, an early sect that retained the Jewish law as binding on Christians, and maintained that Jesus was a man who became God's agent in communicating his gospel to men. Cerinthus belonged to this sect, and held that circumcision was still binding, as well as abstinence from unclean meats.

207. Caliban upon Setebos; or, Natural Theology in the Island. The motto is from Psalm i. 31, and gives the point of view of the poem, which is a study in anthropomorphism. The general conception of the poem was taken from Shakespeare's *Tempest*, who probably made use of Richard Eden's *History of Travaile*, or Antonio Pigafetta's account of the circumnavigation of the globe by Magellan. Eden describes the capture of some natives of Patagonia by stratagem, saying, "When they saw that they were deceived they roared like bulls and cried upon their great devil Setebos to help them." He says of these people again: "They say that when one of them die, there appear x. or xii. devils leaping and dancing about the body of the dead, and seem to have their bodies painted with divers

colors. And that among others there is one seen bigger than the residue, who maketh great mirth and rejoicing. This great devil they call *Setebos*, and call the lesser *Cheleule*. One of these giants which they took, declared by signs that he had seen devils with two horns above their heads, with long hair down to their feet; and that they cast forth fire at their throats both before and behind. The Captain named these people *Patagoni*. The most of them wear the skins of such beasts whereof I have spoken before; and have no house of continuance, but maketh certain cottages which they cover with the said skins, and carry them from place to place. They live off raw flesh and a certain sweet root which they call *Capar*." (4) *while he kicks*, the poet may have used the third person here with the supposition that it represents an early stage in the development of language.

213:23, *the Quiet*, an idea common to early religions, but rather of a people so far advanced as the early Greeks than of the Patagonians. (24) *conquer Setebos*, in this being we must see the deity of the Patagonians rather than their devil; and that they expected him to submit to a higher power is to be assumed had these natives been much more advanced than they were.

215. May and Death. This poem was written on the death of a cousin, the Charles of the poem being the old, familiar "Jim" often mentioned by the poet, even in later years. The mother of this cousin and his two brothers, all of whom died early, a Mrs. Silverthorne, was the aunt who paid for the printing of *Pauline*. (13) *one plant*, the spotted Persicaria, or *Polygonum Persicaria*. "It is a common weed with purple stains upon its rather large leaves; these spots varying in size and vividness of color, according to the nature of the soil where it grows. A legend attaches to this plant and attributes these stains to the blood of Christ having fallen on its leaves, growing below the cross."

216. Deaf and Dumb. A Group by Woolner. This poem was written in 1862 for Woolner's partly-draped group of Constance and Arthur, the deaf and dumb children of Sir Thomas Fairbairn, which was exhibited at the International Exhibition of 1862; but the lines did not appear in the Exhibition *Catalogue*.

216. Prospice. This title means "look forward." The poem was written in the autumn succeeding the death of Mrs. Browning, and it is the poet's expression of his strong faith in a personal immortality. His faith in a life beyond death appears in *Apparent Failure*, *Pisgah Sights*, *Evelyn Hope*, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, *Jochanan Hakkadosh*, *La Saisiaz*, *Reverie*, and other poems. In these poems, as well as in *Prospice*, his manner is dramatic and poetical, but the idea is quite as distinct as and more emphatic than in plain prose. He has also spoken in prose. To a friend, not long before his death, he said: "Death, death! It is this harping on death I despise so much, — this idle and often cowardly as well as ignorant harping! Why should we not change like everything else? In fiction, in poetry, French as well as English, and, I am told, in American art and literature, the shadow of death — call it what you will, despair, negation, indifference — is upon us. But what fools who talk thus! Why, *amico mio*, you know as well as I that death is life, just as our

daily, our momentarily dying body is none the less alive and ever recruiting new forces of existence. Without death, which is our crape-like, churchyardy word for change, for growth, there could be no prolongation of that which we call life. Pshaw! it is foolish to argue upon such a thing even. For myself, I deny death as an end of anything. Never say of me that I am dead." At an earlier period, and to another friend, he said: "If there is anything I hold to, it is *that:* why, I know I shall meet my dearest friends again!"

217. Eurydice to Orpheus. A Picture by Leighton. This poem first appeared in the Royal Academy exhibition catalogue for 1864, but in the form of prose. It was printed with the author's name and called "A Fragment." The picture by Frederick Leighton represents Eurydice speaking to Orpheus while on their way from Hades, after he had obtained permission that his wife should accompany him again to earth, on condition that he should not look back upon her until they had reached the upper world.

217. Youth and Art. (8) *Gibson*, John, sculptor, whose "Tinted Venus" is well known, 1790–1866. (12) *Grisi*, a famous opera-singer.

218: 11, *E in alt*, high E or E in the upper part of the scale. (12) *chromatic scale*, one that advances by half-tones.

219: 8, *bals-paré*, dress balls. (10) *R. A.*, a member of the Royal Academy.

219. A Face. (3) *the Tuscan's early art*, which was under Byzantine influence and used gold backgrounds. (14) *Correggio loves to mass*, in the use of chiaroscuro, the concentration of light and shade, and the massing of brilliant colors.

220. A Likeness. (18) *Tipton Slasher*, an English boxer. (22) *Rarey*, a famous horse-tamer. (23) *Sayers*, an English prize-fighter.

221: 23, *Festina lentè*, Hasten slowly. (29) *Volpato*, engineer and designer, 1738–1803.

222. Mr. Sludge, "The Medium." An interpretation of Spiritualism on one side of it, that of credulity and imposture. The poem was probably suggested by the career of D. D. Home. Browning gave much attention to spiritualism during several years, his wife being a strong believer in it. Miss M. R. Mitford wrote that "Mrs. Browning believes in every spirit-rapping story;" and that she "is positively crazy about the spirit-rappings." Her cousin, Henry Chorley, said that "she lent an ear as credulous as her trust was sincere and her heart high-minded" to the claims of mesmerism and clairvoyance. Browning's inclination to doubt on this subject is clearly shown in Hawthorne's *French and Italian Note-Books*, where, under date of June 9, 1858, record is made of a conversation very significant with reference to this poem, which was written not long after that time: "There was no very noteworthy conversation; the most interesting topic being that disagreeable and now wearisome one of spiritual communications, as regards which Mrs. Browning is a believer, and her husband an infidel. Browning and his wife had both been present at a spiritual session held by Mr. Home, and had seen and felt the unearthly hands, one of which had placed a laurel wreath on Mrs. Browning's head. Browning, however, avowed his

belief that these hands were affixed to the feet of Mr. Home, who lay extended in his chair, with his legs stretched far under the table. The marvelousness of the fact, as I have read of it, and heard it from other eye-witnesses, melted strangely away in his hearty gripe, and at the sharp touch of his logic ; while his wife, ever and anon, put in a little gentle word of expostulation." In her biography of the poet, Mrs. Orr gives a detailed and explicit statement of his position on this subject.

223:20, *Greeley's newspaper*, the New York *Tribune*, which was open to the consideration of every new interest of the time.

224:6, *Bacon came and said*, in his essays the one numbered lviii. is devoted to the vicissitude of things.

225:17, *Johnson . . . Wesley*, both these men were credulous about ghosts and apparitions, as their biographies will show. (33) *phenomena*, the name given by spiritualists to table-tipping, tinkling of bells, writing by means of raps, etc.

226:6, *Porson*, Richard, a very learned scholar, professor of Greek and librarian at the London Institution, 1759–1808.

230:12, *Hymn in G, with a natural F;* as G requires F sharp, this hymn is an impossibility, as would be "consecutive fourths."

240:16, *Pasiphae*, who was enamored of a bull, according to the Greek myth. (31) *odic lights*, from od, the name given by Reichenback to an influence he thought he had discovered, which he maintained accounted for the luminous appearances connected with spirits and ghosts.

245:42, *canthus of my eye*, corner of the eye.

246:38, *Magnum et terribile*, great and terrible.

247:38, *stomach-cyst*, an infusoria, a mere bag, without limbs or organs, one of the simplest forms of animal life.

248:16, *Bridgewater book*, one of the works on scientific subjects prepared as the result of a bequest by the Earl of Bridgewater, that attempted to show the ways of God in the processes of creation, among the books being Whewell's *Astronomy* and Bell's *The Hand*.

257. Apparent Failure. When Browning was once passing through Paris, the Morgue, a small Doric building on one of the quays, was about to be destroyed, as announced in a city newspaper. He wrote this poem with the purpose of saving the building. He relates in the poem what he had seen in the Morgue seven years before, in the summer of 1856, when he was in the city to witness the baptism of Prince Louis Napoleon, only child of Napoleon III., Emperor of France. As he was walking along the banks of the Seine, he thought of the Congress of the European Powers then being held in the city with reference to the freedom and unity of Italy, in which a prominent part was taken by Prince Gortschakoff, the Russian minister of foreign affairs ; Cavour, the great Italian statesman, then prime minister of Piedmont ; and Count Buol, the Austrian minister of foreign affairs. Cavour sought to interest the Powers in behalf of Italy, but Buol opposed any intervention. (12) *Petrarch's Vaucluse*, Fontaine de Vaucluse, a celebrated fountain, in the department of Vaucluse, in southern France, the source of the Sorgue. The village named after it was for some time the residence of Petrarch.

259. Epilogue. (1) *Feast of Feasts*, dedication of Solomon's temple, as described in 1 Kings viii. and ix.; 2 Chronicles v. and vi. (second sub-title), *Renan*, the great French Orientalist, author of *Vie de Jésus*.

263. Balaustion's Adventure, including a Transcript from Euripides. The verse that serves as a motto is from Mrs. Browning's *Wine of Cyprus*. (2) *Kameiros*, a Dorian town on the west coast of Rhodes, the chief one on the island before the founding of Rhodes. (7) *Nikias*, one of the three commanders in the expedition against Sicily in the Peloponnesian war. After two years the Syracusans attacked the Athenian forces, Nicias was taken prisoner and killed. (8) *Syracuse*, capital of Sicily. (10) *Rhodes*, large island south of Caria and northeast of Crete.

264:1, *the League*, Spartan league against the dominion of Athens, including many Greek states. (4) *Knidos*, town in Caria on Triopian promontory. (8) *Ilissian*, Trojan. (15) *gate of Diomedes*, in Athens, the gate leading to a grove and gymnasism; *Hippadia*, leading to suburb of Cerameicus. (19) *Lakonia*, state of which Sparta was the capital. (20) *Choës*, drinking vessels, a festival in honor of Dionysos devoted to drinking; *Chutroi*, another drinking festival to Dionysos. (21) *Agora*, market-place at Athens; *Dikasteria*, tribunals; *Poikilé*, the great public hall in Athens. (22) *Pnux*, the place of public assembly in Athens; *Keramikos*, two of the Athenian suburbs bore this name; *Salamis*, the large island, off the west coast of Attica, where the Persians were defeated in 480 B. C. (23) *Psuttalia*, small island near Salamis; *Marathon*, town twenty-two miles east of Athens, where battle with Persians was fought. (24) *Dionusiac theatre*, great theatre on Acropolis at Athens. (26) *Aischulos, Sophocles, Euripides*, these writers of tragedy, almost in their own lifetime, came to be accepted as the great standard dramatic poets of Greece, whose works were produced everywhere in the Greek world and studied by every schoolboy. (30) *Kaunos*, one of the chief cities of Caria, founded by Cretans. (37) *Point Malea*, promontory of Peloponnesus. (41) *Cos*, one of the Sporades; *Crete*, large island south of Ægean Sea.

265:4, *Lokrian*, belonging to Locri Ozolæ, on south shore of Corinthian Gulf, uncivilized race, given to theft and piracy; *Thessaly*, one of the northernmost states of Greece, wild and uncivilized. (28) *Ortugia*, an island included in city of Syracuse.

266:2, *pint of corn*, Thucydides says: "They were tormented with hunger and thirst; for during eight months they gave each of them daily only a cotyle (half pint) of water and two of corn." (25) *Aischulos*, song sung by Balaustion taken from this tragic poet. (30) *salpinx*, trumpet. (35) *Gulippos*, the Spartan general who defeated Demosthenes and Nicias at Syracuse. (40) "*Region of the Steed*," Greece, from its large numbers of horses.

267:9, "*Decadence*," criticism of Euripides because he did not conform to the tragic standards of the older poets. (11) *God Bacchos*, Dionysos, one of latest gods introduced into Greece, god of trees, fruits and vine, in whose worship theatre originated. (17) *rhesis*, proverbial saying or quotation. (19) *monostich*, single verse. (33) *Euoi, Oöp, Babai*, exclamations of surprise or wonder.

268:15, *Rosy Isle*, Rhodes, the name being originally rodon = roses. (20) *verse that ends all, proverb-like;* several of the dramas of Euripides were ended with a statement like this: "Many are the shapes of things the deities direct, and many things the gods perform contrary to our expectations. And those things which we looked for are not accomplished; but the god hath brought to pass things not looked for. Such hath been the event of this affair." (28) *Glaukinos*, Archon in 438 B. C. (31) *Lenean feast*, the winter festival in worship of Dionysos was devoted to comedy.

269:32, *Peiraieus*, the port of Athens. (33) *Anthesterion-month*, February-March. (45) *Agathon*, tragic poet, won first victory in 416, which is celebrated in Plato's *Symposium*, went to Macedon in 406 B. C.; *Iophon*, son of Sophocles, produced fifty plays and won several victories.

270:1, *Kephisophon*, poet, friend of Euripides. (26) *mask of the actor move*, every actor wore a mask representing character he personated, though certain fixed types were universally used.

271:10, *Baccheion*, temple in which Bacchus or Dionysos was worshipped.

272:5, *Phoibos*, bright or pure, name of Apollo; *Asklepios*, god of healing. (14) *Moirai*, Fates.

273:23, *Pelias' daughter*, Alcestis, daughter of Pelias.

274:25, *Eurustheus*, King of Mycenae, who imposed on Heracles the twelve labors as expiation for murder of his children in fit of insanity sent by Hera.

275:36, *Paian*, name of Apollo, indicative of his healing power, derived from Paian, physician of the gods in Homer; hymn of thanksgiving addressed to him was called a Pæan.

176:16, *Lukia*, Lycia in Asia Minor; *Ammon's seat*, temple of Jupiter Ammon in Libya of Egypt.

279:30, *pharos*, a veil or covering for the eyes.

280:29, *Iolkos*, town in Thessaly. (34) *Charon*, boatman on river Styx, who ferried souls to Hades.

283:37, *Orpheus*, "the great poet of Thrace to the poets of later times, but to the Orphists he was far more, the man who had gone down alive to Hades in search for his lost Eurydice, and had thence returned to instruct and raise mankind." (38) *Koré*, the maiden, daughter of Demeter, and wife of Hades. (40) *Plouton's dog*, Cerberus, who guarded gates of Hades.

287:15, *Acherontian lake*, river of woe in Hades. (19) *seven-stringed mountain-shell*, early Greek lyre with tortoise shell for sounding-board. (22) *Karneian month*, August-September, when the Carnean festival was celebrated in honor of Apollo Carneus, protector of flocks. (29) *Kokutos' stream*, river in Hades.

289:22, *Tirunthian*, from Thirynthus, town in Argolis, of which Eurystheus was king. (26) *Thrakian Diomedes*, king of Thrace who fed his horses on human flesh, and who was destroyed by Heracles. (30) *Bistones*, Thracians.

290:13, *Ares*, god of war, whose chief home was in Thrace; *targe*, shield. (20) *Lukaon*, king of Arcadia. (21) *Kuknos*, son of Mars and Pelopea, slain by Heracules.

291:6, *sprung from Perseus*, Alcmene was granddaughter of Perseus.

294:26, *lyric Puthian*, Apollo when worshipped with music, so called because of his victory over the Python. (33) *Othrus' dell*, in mountains of Othrys, Thessaly, residence of Centaurs. (42) *Boibian lake*, in Thessaly, near Mount Ossa.

295:1, *Molossoi*, people of Epirus, in Northern Greece. (2) *Aigaian*, Ægean sea; *Pelion*, mountain of Thessaly.

302:26, *Hermes*, god of propagation and the increase of flocks and herds, later the giver of wealth and eloquence as well as good fortune, the divine herald who conducts souls to Hades; *Hades*, the underworld, abode of souls after death, also name of its god, a brother of Zeus. (30) *Bride of Hades*, Persephone or Coré.

304:37, *Turannos*, tyrannus, tyrant.

305:13, *Ai, ai, pheu, pheu, e, papai*, woe, alas, alas, O strange.

306:22, *the Helper*, Heracles.

307:5, *Kupris*, Aphrodite, goddess of Cyprus.

308:26, *Larissa*, city in Thessaly.

313:22, *Thrakian tablets;* Orpheus being associated with Thrace, the reference is to the Orphic literature that occupied so large attention in later history of Greece. (34) *Chaluboi*, people near Pontus in Asia Minor.

316:19, *Pheraioi*, people of Pheræ.

321:24, *Sthenelos*, son of Perseus and Andromeda.

322:20, *The Human with his droppings of warm tears*, quotation from Mrs. Browning in *Wine of Cyprus*. (38) *Mainad*, priestess of Dionysos.

324:13, *last moan of a minor*, "a minor chord written in its first inversion, that is, with the third in the base, can suddenly be changed to a major chord by chromatically raising the third." — Editors of *Poet-Lore*.

326:36, *a car submissive brutes were yoked to*, the test made by Pelias that his daughter should be given to the one who would win her in a chariot drawn by lions and boars, and this condition Admetus complied with by the help of Apollo.

327:16, *straying among the flowers in Sicily*, the capture of Persephone or Coré by Hades, as she was plucking flowers, who made her his bride.

328:19, *I know the poetess*, Mrs. Browning in her *Wine of Cyprus*. (23) *a great Kaunian painter*, Protogenes, native of Kaunia in Caria, painting from 332 to 300 B. C., not recognized by his countrymen until Apelles of Rhodes proposed to buy all his paintings. The picture described was painted by Sir Frederick Leighton.

331. PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU, SAVIOR OF SOCIETY. The motto is from the *Hercules Furens* of Euripides, and it will be found translated somewhat differently in *Aristophanes' Apology*. The name of the prince is taken from Hohen-Schwangau, one of the castles of the King of Bavaria. Why the poet should have chosen this name it is difficult to understand, and there probably was no explicit reason. The sub-title is that given Napoleon III. by his admirers, especially immediately following the *coup d'état*. The person to whom the Emperor is speaking may have been his English friend, Miss Howard, who accompanied him to France on the cessation of his banishment. (6) *Œdipus*, who guessed the riddle of

the sphinx, is referred to because the Emperor's vacillating policy, that was sometimes democratic and sometimes imperialist, and usually a mixture of both, needed some one to explain the meaning of it. (8) *Leicester Square*, the region in London where French refugees lived, and where Louis Napoleon had lived in 1838 and in 1847. (11) *rede*, counsel or discernment. (14) *Home*, the American medium discussed in *Mr. Sludge*, here made type of trickster and charlatan. (18) *Corinth*, the luxurious Greek city, is declared not typical of the luxury of Paris and the Empire. (19) *Thebes* becomes type of duller and more moral city; *Lais* is brought to mind to show that this luxury is not corrupting, as her name implies.

332:26, *Euclid*, whose geometrical figures are used to symbolize the connection between the Emperor's democracy and his imperialism, to show how he is able to pass from the one to the other, and how they fit into his scheme of government.

333:8, *somebody in Thrace*, Democritus, whose theory of atoms is referred to as indicative of the small things that may be made of use as political forces.

334:23, *Residenz*, the German name for the residence of a prince.

335:30, *Pradier Magdalen*, statue of St. Mary Magdalen by James Pradier, in the Louvre.

338:41, *some star-change*, an argument for the *coup d'état* drawn from the revolutionary changes produced by the ice period, which was the result of great cosmical movements.

339:14, *some dervish*, etc., as great cosmical changes produce revolutions in the nature of a country, as unaccountable from point of view of human activities is the appearance of the "great man," who brings a new life and destiny to that country, an idea presented in *L'Idée Napoléonienne*, published in London, 1840, by Louis Napoleon.

341:14, *Fourier*, *Comte*, whose theories of society are condemned because they give definite scientific reasons for social changes. (25) (*kibe*), chap or chilblain.

343:1, "*O littleness of man*," probably the Emperor's hit at Victor Hugo, who, in his *Les Châtiments*, *Légende des Siècles*, and other poems, had spoken in contempt of Louis Napoleon. (23) *Bond Street*, fashionable promenade in London during eighteenth century.

344:28, *God, what a geometer art Thou*, Plato called God the great geometer.

347:20, *Hercules substitutes his own for Atlas' shoulder*, on his eleventh labor in pursuit of apples of Hesperides, Hercules held up the vault of heaven while Atlas plucked the apples. (25) *Œta*, on the top of this mountain Hercules builds the funeral pile on which he is burned.

348:42, *Proudhon*, Pierre Joseph, 1809–1865, who maintained that property is robbery, and was twice imprisoned for his revolutionary words, during the rule of Napoleon III.

349:1, *Great Nation*, the phrase "La Grande Nation" was several times used of France by Napoleon III. (15) *blowing hot and cold*, statement of the charge that he was vacillating in his opinions, being in favor of democratic principles and imperial authority, French supremacy and federation of Europe. (33) *once upon a time*, the period when Napoleon was a democrat and taught the rights of man, and when he proclaimed the liberties of the people.

351: 15, *cool Cayenne,* the hot region of French Guiana, where political prisoners were given an opportunity to cool off their enthusiasms. (42) *the bodily want serve first,* in a pamphlet of 1844, on the *Extinction of Poverty,* Louis Napoleon held that the first need was material welfare in order to secure progress of civilization, and as Emperor he carried on large public works in order to improve the condition of the people.

352: 11, *Barabbas,* if the people gain no material prosperity they will vote as blindly as when Barabbas was released and Christ crucified, Matthew xxviii. 15–21.

353: 29, *practise as exile . . . my ups and downs,* the career of Louis Napoleon was checkered in the highest degree, banished more than once from France, imprisoned for years, his efforts to gain power proving failures.

354: 14, *Xerxes stayed his march for one plane-tree,* as described by Herodotus, vii. 31.

356: 1, *Kant,* the great German philosopher, 1724–1804, is regarded as a type of political unfitness. (38) *Terni,* falls of Velino, in central Italy, near Perugia.

358: 28, *Thiers-and-Victor-Hugo exercise,* on the one side Thiers favored the Emperor, while on the other Hugo bitterly opposed him, both historians of the period. (40) *chose this man its President,* Louis Napoleon was President of the French Republic from 1848 to 1852, and when some doubt appeared as to the result of the election, in 1851, he filled Paris with troops and brought about his reëlection for ten years.

361: 42, *dock the electoral body,* in 1850 the suffrage was limited by the Assembly, but in 1851 Louis Napoleon proclaimed its restoration, and all thus enfranchised voted for him when he asked for reëlection.

362: 42, *there was uprising,* insurrection and street fights, described in Victor Hugo's *History of a Crime.*

365: 24, *Rome . . . for Romans,* Louis Napoleon had joined in attempt of 1831 to secure Italian independence, but in 1849 he sent an army to Rome to deliver the Pope from those seeking the same result, but masked his position under the claim that he was seeking to regulate the effort for Italian liberty.

366: 2, *Brennus broke his pate,* attempt of the leader of the Gauls, in 382 B. C., to capture Rome, which led to his destruction. (41) *the war came,* that for liberation of Italy from Austrian rule.

368: 7, *favorable weariness from war,* claim of Louis Napoleon that the Empire was devoted to peace, and yet he said that there were several conquests he wished to make in order to secure the material prosperity of the country and procure labor for all the people. (28) *boulevard-building;* much was done by Louis Napoleon to improve and beautify Paris.

373: 12, *we laid her low in old bad days,* failure of France to defend Italy against Austria, in 1831 and 1849. (31) *cession of Savoy and Nice,* which took place in 1860, on the demand of the Emperor. (33) *Metternich,* the Prime Minister of Austria, 1773–1859.

374: 6, *fittest man to rule,* the claim of Louis Napoleon that the overwhelming vote which reëlected him in 1851 fitted him to become Emperor, in 1852, by almost unanimous vote of the people. (18)

wed the pick of the world, Napoleon III. married Eugénie Montijo, Comtesse de Téba, in 1853.

375:17, *Salvatore's boy;* the son of Napoleon III. was born in 1856, and the father is made to say he has many gifts, even being able to surpass at painting the son of Salvator Rosa. (29) *river that makes oxen white*, Clitumus, in Umbria, legend claiming it had the effect mentioned. (36) *Land of the Ox*, Italy, which name is derived from *Italos* or *Itulos*, which in old Greek meant "an ox." (40) *calm fane of the Clitumnian god*, legend that follows belongs to temple of Nemi, mentioned at 379:7, as Browning requested Mrs. Orr to say.

379:16, *my Cousin-Duke*, son of Jerome Bonaparte, usually called Prince Napoleon, 1822–1891.

384. Fifine at the Fair. ii. 3, *hoarding*, boards, from hoard, fence. (6) *Pornic*, described by Matilda Betham-Edwards, in her *A Year in Western France:* "A delicious little seaside resort, now crowded and fashionable, but forty years ago a handful of fishermen's huts only, is Pornic on the Bay of Biscay. Half Italian, half Algerian in aspect, with its intense blue sea, emerald hills, and tiny white town built terrace-wise above the small enclosed port, Pornic is a place in which even the tropical heats of French summers are bearable. Here are shady walks close to the sea, little groves of silvery poplar and acacia, and long winding walks along the rocks. I recollect nothing on a small scale prettier or more gracious than this little port of Pornic. . . . Sea-bathing at Pornic is a sociable and amusing pastime. Friends, neighbors, and young people given to flirtation put on their coquettish bathing-dresses, and play about in the water in company. In spite of the intense heat, Pornic is as crowded as it can be during the season, though there seems to be no other attraction but the aforesaid constitutional sea-walks." (8) *bateleurs, baladines*, conjurers and street dancers.

iii. 10, *tricot*, a close-fitting knit garment.

iv. 1, *prepend*, from *perpendere*, to weigh well. (2) *Gawain to gaze upon the Grail*, in *Morte d'Arthur*, cousin of King Arthur, who was warned he could not find the grail because of his evil life.

ix. 9, *windlestraws*, tufted hair-grass.

xv. 12, *bistre*, pigment made from wood-soot. (16) *almandines*, a variety of garnet.

xvi. 1, *quarte and tierce*, a fencing term, a peculiar kind of thrust.

xix. 4, *sick Louis*, Louis XI., 1423–1483.

xx. 1, *Helen pushed . . . by Lady Venus*, the wife of Menelaus was given to Paris by Venus, thus bringing about Trojan war. (9) *Cleopatra*, her conquest of Antony, as told by Plutarch in his life of that general.

xxvii. 3, *a certain myth*, that of Helen as told by Euripides in his *Helena*.

xxx. 8, *Ptolemaic witch*, Cleopatra, daughter of the Ptolemies, who is compared to the mirror that reflects light, in contrast with Helen, who is like a shield that draws all light to itself; but the saint is like the stained window that modifies it, while Fifine is as the sherd of broken glass that merely sparkles with the light.

xxxvi. 15, *pochade*, rough sketch. (20) *Doré*, Gustav, illustrator, 1833–1883.

xlii. 6, *Bazzi*, Il Sodoma, Italian painter, 1479–1549. (9) *inharmonic change*, "the modulation here described is one from the dominant (that is, the chord on the fifth degree of the scale) of D♯ minor, A♯, C×, E♯, G♯, which is inharmonically changed (that is, the signature of the notes is changed without their pitch being changed), so that it becomes what is called the augmented sixth chord on the lowered sixth of D major, and would read B♭, D, F♯, G♯, and instead of being resolved on the tonic of D♯ minor, as it would be in the first instance, is resolved on the tonic of D major. It is one of the most surprising and beautiful of musical modulations, and the poet is right in hinting that no technical description of it can portray the effect of this leap into light and life." — Editors of *Poet-Lore*.

xliv. 6, *ask Plato else*, in *Symposium*, where various views of love are discussed by Socrates, Aristophanes, and Eryximachus. (15) *fiat lux*, let there be light, Genesis i. 3.

xlvii. 3, *Gérôme*, French painter, 1824– .

xlviii. 7, *Reynolds*, Joshua, 1723–1792, portrait painter. (9) *Garrick*, great actor, 1716–1779.

lii. 24, *Eidothée*, sea-goddess, daughter of Proteus, old man of the sea, *Odyssey*, iv. 475.

lix. 23, *Glumdalclich*, in *Gulliver's Travels*, devoted to Gulliver in Brobdignag, girl nine years old and forty feet high. (25) *Theosutos e broteios eper kekramene*, God, man, or both together mixed, *Prometheus Bound* of Æschylus.

lx. 22, *chrysopras*, variety of chalcedony or beryl. (26) *gastro-knemian*, pertaining to calf of the leg.

lxii. 3, *life's common chord*, a common chord contains a root and third major (four semi-tones) or minor (three semi-tones) and a fifth (seven semi-tones) over it. (4) *harmonics far and faint*, sounds produced by the vibrating string of an instrument when it is sub-divided into its several parts.

lxvii. 17, *man, outcast, 'howls,'* refers to Byron's *Childe Harold*, canto iv. 180, where sentiments are expressed that were very distasteful to Browning.

lxix. 5, *Thalassia*, sea-nymph, from Greek word for sea. (6) *Triton*, sea deity, son of Poseidon.

lxxviii. 8, *Arion*, legendary poet connected with origin of tragedy, whose song with lyre attracted dolphins, one of whom rescued him when his boat was overturned. (12) *Periander*, tyrant of Corinth. (13) *Methymnæan hand*, that of Arion, who was born at Methymna in Lesbos. (23) *Orthian*, pertaining to Apollo. (33) *Tænarus*, the place to which the dolphin carried Arion, from which he went to court of Periander.

lxxxii. 44, *see Horace to the boat*, in his *Odes*, i. 3.

lxxxiii. 13, *Long Walls*, those from Athens to Phalerum and to Piraeus. (20) *Iostephanos*, violet-crowned, name given Athens.

xci. 1, *Schumann's "Carnival,"* a celebrated series of musical compositions by Robert Schumann, 1810–1856.

xcii. 52, *she, toe-tips and staccato*, in Schumann's *Carnival*, one piece is called *Columbine and Pantalon;* she is represented in presto staccato passages, and he in legato passages.

xciii. 5, *three keys, flat, flat and flat, never a sharp*, refers to the character of Schumann's composition just mentioned.

cxxi. 4, *Druid monument*, common in and about Pornic, consisting of numerous menhirs, or single huge upright stones.

cxxv. 4, *Theosuton*, etc., same as lix. 25. (9) *comfort to the Titan*, sea-nymphs bringing help to Prometheus when bound to a rock. (20) *Moirai Trimorphoi*, the tri-form Fates.